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A Description of Early Access in Colorado

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A DESCRIPTION OF EARLY ACCESS IN COLORADO

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Abstract

Early access, as defined in Colorado statute, remains optional. There is a shortage of administrative units engaged in an early access process to admit gifted young learners ahead of neurotypical age peers. Only 21 school districts currently use their addendum as evidenced by the receipt of Colorado state funding. Indeed, "there exists a basic lack of awareness of the effectiveness of the intervention, the impact on the student's social-emotional development, as well as concern for the lack of consistent procedures for making this decision" (Assouline, Colangelo, Van Tassel-Baska, & Lupinski-Shoplik, 2015, p. 54). In this retrospective mixed-methods study, the researcher gathered quantitative and qualitative data and applied the lens of diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) to understand the positive aspects of early access processes according to those currently implementing an early access addendum in Colorado. The researcher also sought to identify which aspects contribute to creating and conducting successful early access processes. The researcher examined 31 early access documents noting the similarities and differences in the processes. In addition, a survey was sent to 31 Colorado gifted leaders engaged in early access to gather perceptions of their successful processes. Conclusions drawn from this study include evidence that successful processes exist. Positive aspects included open communication among stakeholders, following clear process guidelines, and decision making based on a body of evidence. The recommendations call for ongoing professional learning about early access, open

communication with all stakeholders and using a team of professionals to evaluate young gifted learners. With increased adoption of the legislation, additional gifted children across Colorado can benefit, and early access can become a more widely diffused innovation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Young gifted learners are at the core of this research study, a study guided by the call to "find academically talented children and provide early entrance to school" (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 81). Prior to my tenure, nine years ago, as the assistant director for learning services responsible for gifted education in a large suburban school district, full-grade accelerations were few, and no specific process for evaluation and determination existed. In this role nine years ago, I was compelled to purchase the Iowa Acceleration Scales, a full-grade acceleration process, for the school district (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscomb, & Forstadt, 2009). The Iowa Acceleration Scales helped student study teams look at a body of evidence about a student and quantify the data and understand the data where acceleration had once been left to personal, gut-level, emotional decision making.

In 2008, the state of Colorado proposed and passed into law House Bill 08-1021 Early Access (Early Access Legislation, 2008, CO HB 08-1021), which became Colorado State Law 22-20-204(2) or C.S.L. 22-20-204(2) (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2008). The legislation allowed identified gifted children up to one full year younger than kindergarten and first-grade age minimums to enroll in school ahead of age peers. *Early access* is a form of whole-grade acceleration that specifically impacts the youngest gifted learners in the population—children under Age six (CDE, 2008). I was thrilled to coordinate writing the early access addendum to meet the requirements of the

Early Access law (CDE, 2008) The addendum was submitted and subsequently approved by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). As part of the new responsibilities, I managed the entire early access process from initial parent inquiry to acceptance and placement for each early access child.

From years as an early childhood educator, I knew and understood all children grew and learned at very different rates, and gifted children in particular presented asynchronously (Silverman, 1993). I have remained keenly interested in the needs of the young gifted learner specifically. In my role, I wanted to understand what the best options were for all gifted learners, and specifically how the public education can serve the youngest gifted learners early in their school careers. It is these young gifted students that I keep at the forefront, daily looking for better ways to support and challenge our best and our brightest. Peters, Matthews, McBee, and McCoach (2014), on the topic of acceleration, stated "repetition wastes valuable time that could be spent learning new material" (p. 85). "Acceleration (especially whole grade) is one of the least consistently utilized strategies among approaches in the field of gifted education for meeting the needs of academically advanced learners" (Peters et al., 2014, p. 86). There are multiple ways to advance students (Assouline et al., 2009, 2015; Colangelo et al., 2004; Smutney, Walker, & Meckstroth, 2007). I have dedicated my professional life to finding better, creative ways to advance, accelerate, and compact subject matter, and to advance gifted students by grade, topic, and course whenever possible. I seek reasons to say, yes to advancement.

Overview of the Study

Currently, 31 early access addenda are filed with the CDE, representing 75 individual Colorado school districts that have approved addendum in place (CDE addenda, 2016). To date, only 29 school districts have used their plans to identify and admit gifted young children for kindergarten and first grade (CDE, 2016). The remaining 103 school districts in Colorado have taken no action to write or submit an early access addendum (CDE, 2016).

As Honig (2006) suggests, "those interested in improving the quality of education policy implementation should focus not simply on what's implementable and what works but rather investigate under what conditions, if any, various education policies get implemented and work" (p. 2). This study aimed to understand better the positive aspects of early access implementation in Colorado, and how these positive aspects can engage additional Colorado administrative units (AUs) in the early access legislation to serve more gifted young learners. To accomplish this, first the early access addenda documents currently filed with the CDE were reviewed. Second, a survey was created and distributed it to 31 administrative unit leaders who had a CDE-approved early access addendum to explore their perceptions of early access implementation. Finally, the 31 addenda and the fiscal documents pertaining to early access reporting and funding were examined.

Persistent Problem of Practice

Though there has been an early access rule in the Colorado statute since 2008 (i.e., C.S.L. 22-20-204[2]), fewer than half of the school districts and AUs in the state of have opened their doors to admit and serve underage gifted learners (CDE, 2017). It was

therefore imperative to understand how it can be enacted more broadly across the state of Colorado for the benefit of gifted young learners. Experts in gifted education eagerly assert that early identification and appropriate educational intervention for gifted young children increases the probability of future extraordinary achievement and reduces the risk of later emotional and educational problems (Harrison, 2004; Hodge & Kemp, 2000; Morelock & Feldman, 1992; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2002; Silverman, 1997; Stile, Kitano, Kelley, & Lecrone, 1993; Whitmore, 1980).

Smutney et al. (2007) asked, "A frequent objection to permitting a child early entrance to kindergarten, to be advanced a grade, or even to be allowed to learn a subject she or he has already mastered in his or her grade level is. But what about socialization?" (p. 146). Smutney et al. (2007) suggest many reasons that early entrance is rejected: schools do not want to permit early exiting, the child is considered too physically small and immature, decision makers are unfamiliar with the research, administrators or educators have personal opposition to early entrance without specific arguments; and principals do not deem exceptional ability a convincing reason for early entrance. Similarly, Colangelo et al. (2004) stated, "Few preschool teachers believe that gifted preschoolers should be encouraged to enter kindergarten at a younger age" (Assouline et al., 2009, p. 10). If preschool teachers and school administrators do not believe in early advancement for gifted young learners, this indicates more work needs to be done to find and highlight successes using the Colorado early access legislation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the positive aspects of early access processes according to those currently implementing an early access addendum.

Participants were asked about their understanding of early access legislation, their perceptions of best practices in evaluating and placing gifted young learners, and the compelling reasons their AUs elected to engage in an early access process. The study focused on two central questions to explore the most important aspects of early access processes as used by current implementers.

Research Questions

1. What are the most important aspects of early access processes according to those implementing early access?
2. What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful early access process in Colorado?

The results of the study were viewed through the lens of the diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory (Rogers, 2003), which asserts that new ideas take time to become routine practice. This theory is applicable in this study for while early access legislation has existed for eight years, only 51.8% of all Colorado AUs currently use the legislation to admit gifted young learners (Rogers, 2003). The findings of this study will be shared with its community partner, the Colorado Department of Education Director for Gifted Education.

Rationale for the Study

For as many years as there have been schools, educators have considered the differences in learners. Marie Montessori (1870–1952) considered the nature and needs of children over 100 years ago in Italy. Leta Hollingworth (1886–1939) pioneered studies on gifted children over a century ago, and Lewis Terman (1877–1956), author of the Stanford-Binet assessment, worked on measuring intellectual capability early in the 20th

century. There is an overwhelming amount of research on the academic benefits of acceleration and peer ability grouping, though it continues to face opposition in many public school districts (e.g., Colangelo et al., 2004; Cornell, Callahan, Bassin, & Ramsay, 1991; Gagné & Gagnier, 2004; Gross, 1992, 2004; Kulik & Kulik, 1982, 1984, 1987, 1992; Lubinski, 2004; Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, & Benbow, 2001; Moon, Swift, & Shallenberger, 2002; Noble, Arndt, Nicholson, Sletten, & Zamora, 1999; Richardson & Benbow, 1990; Rogers, 2004; Southern, Jones, & Fiscus, 1991; Swiatek & Benbow, 1991). Despite this body of research, both parents and educators are still reluctant to move children faster through the education system than is dictated by their chronological age placement (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Grade acceleration and early entrance to kindergarten and first grade are particularly met with skepticism (Coleman & Cross, 2001). In light of this fact, and with the current legislation to allow easy access in Colorado, a study was needed to examine the successes of early access.

The utility of a mixed-methods approach is indicated in the literature (Creswell 2003, 2013; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). Mixed methods involves combining quantitative and qualitative data in the research study. "While mixed method is a newer research approach, increasing use since the mid-1980s, it allows for multiple collections of data from various sources to develop stronger support of the research and problem to create a solution" (Creswell, 2013, p. 14). In the case of this study, the combination of documents from state datasets with survey data told a full story of early access successes in Colorado since 2008.

Literature Review Overview

The literature reviewed in this study explores topics regarding young gifted learners through a historical perspective of early childhood gifted needs, gifted identification considerations, and gifted programming for young learners both nationally and internationally. The theoretical foundation of this research was based on Rogers' (2003) DOI theory.

Burns and Tunnard (1991) stated that "gifted preschoolers really need a differentiated program as early as age three and four. The differentiation is necessary due to the differences in the gifted child's physical, academic, and intellectual development and their varying attention spans." Colangelo et al. (2009) further implored educators to use acceleration as an appropriate intervention: "Acceleration is an intervention that moves students through an educational program at rates faster, or at younger ages, than typical. It means matching the level of complexity, and pace of the curriculum to the readiness and motivation of the student" (p. 81). Early access, according to Colorado House Bill 08-1021, aimed to permit gifted young learners access to school ahead of age peers. The Colorado Department of Education (2017) defines a *highly advanced gifted child* as:

> A gifted child whose body of evidence demonstrates a profile of exceptional ability or potential compared to same-age gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, early access to educational services may be considered as a special provision. For purposes of early access into kindergarten or first grade, the highly advanced gifted child exhibits exceptional ability and potential for accomplishment in cognitive process and academic areas. (ESEA Rule 12.01[13])

The Colorado Department of Education's (2017) definition of *early access* is "early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for highly advanced gifted children under the age of six" (ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]).

Methodology Overview

A mixed-methods design was used to investigate current gifted leaderships' perceptions regarding successful early access processes. The survey consisted of 16 quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey was sent to 31 Colorado AUs with approved early access processes. In addition to the survey, a document was conducted to review 31 early access addenda (process documents) filed with the Colorado Department of Education, and examined three years of funding data for early access provided by a community partner, the CDE Director of Gifted Education. A field pretest with a sample construct was conducted to find out how the data collection protocol and survey instrument worked under realistic conditions. To analyze the data, a series of statistical tests will assess significant similarities and differences in the collected survey data. Descriptive statistics are also used to explain the qualitative findings from the open-ended survey questions, the funding data, and the addenda reviewed.

Delimitations of the Study

The survey portion of the data collection was designed to take less than 15 minutes of a busy administrator's time. Not all of the open-ended questions were answered completely by all respondents. Questions were posed to elicit successful outcomes and stories, however some passions revealed were voiced negatively and in direct nonsupport of early access. The researcher assumed the leadership of every Administrative Unit engaged in early access would respond to the survey.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity, some terms used throughout this research are defined below. This list is in not an exhaustive list of definitions associated with early access and early entrance, however the terms are intended to provide some support to readers.

Administrative Unit (AU). "A school district, a board of cooperative services, or the state Charter School Institute that: oversees and/or provides educational services to exceptional children; is responsible for the local administration of Article 20 of Title 22, C.R.S.; and meets the criteria established in Section 3.01 of these Rules." (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [1]).

Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). "A regional educational services unit created pursuant to Article 5 of Title 22, C.R.S., and designed to provide supporting, instructional, administrative, facility, community, or any other services contracted by participating members" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [7]).

Early access. "Early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for highly advanced gifted children under the age of six" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]).

Early access addendum. "In 2008, an AU may submit an Early Access addendum to its program plan by September 10, 2008. Thereafter, AUs shall submit an addendum for Early Access by January one preceding the initial school year in which will be permitted, thus Early Access assessment may occur after the addendum is approved by the Department" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.08 [1] [e]). "If Early Access is permitted in the AU, an AU shall include in its program plan provisions to identify and serve highly advanced gifted children pursuant to Section 12.08 of these Rules. Constituent schools or

districts within the AU shall abide by the requirements established in the program plan" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.02 [h]).

Early entrance. "A gifted student is placed in a grade level above other same aged peers based upon the following conditions: 12.01 (11) (a) the student is formally identified as gifted as specified in 12.01(12); and 12.01 (11) (b) the student meets requirements for accelerated placement as determined in an auditable body of evidence (e.g., achievement, ability, social-emotional factors, school learning skills, developmental characteristics, and family and school support" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [11], [11a], [11b], [12]).

Highly advanced gifted child. "A gifted child whose body of evidence demonstrates a profile of exceptional ability or potential compared to same-age gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, Early Access to educational services may be considered as a special provision. For purposes of Early Access into kindergarten or first grade, the highly advanced gifted child exhibits exceptional ability and potential for accomplishment in cognitive process and academic areas" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [13]).

Whole-grade acceleration. "A form of grade skipping that places a child in a higher grade than typical age peers" (Assouline et al., 2009, p. 1).

Summary

In spite of the fact that significant documentation supporting the educational needs of gifted children as young as Age three exists, and Colorado legislation has been in place since 2008, few Colorado AUs have engaged the early access process in the elapsed eight years (CDE, 2017). In this chapter, the background, rationale, and purpose

of this study, were presented and the research questions that guided the investigation were identified. Also provided was a brief overview of the literature review and methodology, the delimitations of the study, and definitions of key terms. The following chapters will outline the literature that supports the work of this study, the ways the study was conducted and will provide detailed finings. The last chapter will discuss the findings and propose several follow up studies and methods to share the finding of the study in Colorado and beyond.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review, explores the scholarship on acceleration in research and practice. More specifically, topics regarding gifted learners, particularly: (a) multiple definitions of giftedness; (b) characteristics of gifted learners; (c) characteristics of gifted young learners; (d) identification practices used for gifted young learners; (e) a historical perspective on grade acceleration internationally; (f) grade acceleration practices in the United States; (g) acceleration considerations internationally; (h) acceleration practices specifically in Colorado; (i) an overview of known concerns about acceleration; and (j) existing policies on acceleration, grade skipping, and early entrance to kindergarten and first grade are presented. Colorado is one of two states with early access legislation, however, the acceptance and engagement across the state is limited. Using Rogers (2003) diffusion of innovations theory may help as the researcher explains the progress of diffusion over time.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied to this research was based on Roger's (2003) DOI theory. This theory provides researchers direction in understanding changes in human behavior, particularly by way of its descriptive capacity. Rogers (2003) defined *diffusion* as the process "by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time and among the members of a social system" (p. 11). In this research,

the primary innovation of study was the Colorado Early Access legislation (CDE, 2017). This theory is time-based and comes from a business perspective (Rogers, 2003).

The DOI theory explains that it takes time to learn about a new concept, absorb the ideas, communicate with peers about the idea or innovation, and provide time for decision makers to consider an innovation, as well as additional time to decide if adopting a new concept is right for an organization (or in this case, a school district) and then integrate the innovative idea into an already working system (Rogers, 2003). The rationale for using DOI connects the time-based nature of early access as a new innovation (adopted in 2008) to the time it has taken to be partially integrated Early Access in Colorado (8 years). Currently, only 50.8% of Colorado AUs have adopted the optional legislation. To assess this time factor, the initial dissemination of innovation for early access in the inaugural year of HB-08-1021 (CDE, 2008) to the present is compared. 2016 C.S.L. 22-20-204(2).

According to Rogers (2003), DOI proposes that concept adoption follows an S-curve from initial awareness to communication and processing through adoption and ultimate implementation or rejection. Diffusion of innovations follows a communication flow from initially receiving information about an innovation, to gaining knowledge about the innovation, to sharing the information with stakeholders (referred to as the *persuasion period*), to decision making and confirmation, and ultimately to adoption or rejection of the innovation (Rogers, 2003, p. 11). Figure 1 shows the S-curve of DOI leading to the ideal 100% adoption (Rogers, 2003). The markers (2.5%, 13.5%, 34%, 34%, and 16%) indicate the stages of innovation over time. According to Rogers (2003), in this study the AUs currently engaged with early access are considered *innovators* and

early adopters. They are the first 34% of individual organizations to adopt new innovation in a system. The *late majority* is the next 34% of adopters. The *late adopters* are followed by the *laggards*, who represent the last 16% of adopters (Rogers, 2003). Figure 1 depicts the diffusion as described above. The innovation considered here is the consideration for admitting gifted young learners to school following early access statute and guidelines from the state of Colorado. This chapter continues by defining the gifted learners affected by this innovation.

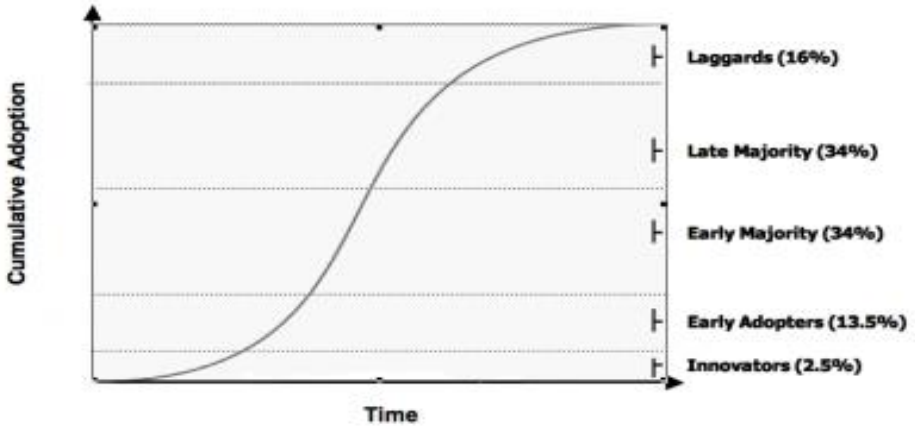

Figure 1. Diffusion of innovations over time. (Rogers, 2003, p. 280.)

Definitions of Giftedness

There are many definitions for *gifted.* This study follows the Colorado definition, which was originally developed as part of the 1972 Marland Report to Congress. Public Law 91-230, Section 806(c) states:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and services beyond those normally provided by the normal school program in order to realize their contributions to self and society.

Colorado adopted the language of the Marland Report (1972), to include:

> Children capable of high performance including those who demonstrated achievement and/or potential in any of the following areas: General intellectual ability, Specific academic aptitude, Creative or productive thinking, Leadership ability, Visual or performing arts, Psychomotor ability, and later removed in 1978. (Marland Report, 1972, pp. 10–11)

Congress revised the Marland definition in 1978 to include preschool, elementary, and secondary students, and to eliminate psychomotor ability (Educational Amendment of 1978, P.L. 93-561, IX [A]). A further congressional revision created a new definition of *giftedness*:

> Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 1993, p. 26)

Of particular note was the inclusion of, "compared with others of their age, experience or environment" (USDE, 1993, p. 26). The 1993 national definition was the first introduction the notion of *age peers*, which was later reflected in the Colorado definition as well. The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1994 (Title 10, Part B) provided a slightly different definition, using the words "evidence of higher performance." The inclusion of "higher performance" suggests that schools need to consider different programming for same age students capable of more advanced work.

The term *gifted and talented student* means children and youth who give evidence of higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity or in specific academic fields that require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to develop such capabilities (USDE, 1993). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 addressed the needto provide services or activities to support students in order to develop their capabilities further. In contrast, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC; 1972) definition included the "aptitude" of the gifted individual and suggested what portion of the population may be considered gifted:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (NAGC, 1972)

Alternatively, Renzulli's (1997) three-ring model describes giftedness as:

> Gifted behavior . . . reflects an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits these clusters being above average (but not necessarily high) general and/or specific ability, high levels of task commitment (motivation), high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance.

Gardner (1993) further defined giftedness, according to his multiple intelligence theory, as the "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings." Gardner (1993) formulated a list of seven intelligences beyond the verbal and computational intelligences noted in earlier definitions: logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and personal intelligences, including both interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence.

The CDE (2015) recently revised the state definition of *gifted children* to include broader considerations in multiple areas of creativity and leadership:

> Gifted Children means those persons between the ages of four and twenty-one, whose aptitude or competence in abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment in one or more domains are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Gifted children are hereafter referred to as gifted students. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e., twice exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness: General or Specific Intellectual Ability, Specific Academic Aptitude, Creative or Productive Thinking, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Musical, and Dance or Psychomotor Abilities.

This definition incorporated the language of both the NAGC (2015) and the Marland Report (1972). The CDE (2015) definition clearly calls for the inclusion of gifted children as young as age four. Gifted young children 0–8 years of age are among the most underserved children, even though early intervention has a significant effect on young children's development (Barbour & Shaklee, 1988). According to the USDE (1993), gifted children are:

> children and youth with outstanding talent performance or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. (p. 26)

Gifted children all exhibit the potential for high performance in the areas included in the U.S. federal definition of gifted and talented students (Johnsen, 2004). Despite the federal definition, the Colorado definition, or the year of the draft it is clear that each version

states that some modified programming must be in place to meet the learning needs of this segment of the young gifted population.

Young Gifted Learners Defined

Burns and Tunnard (1991) stated that:

> Gifted preschoolers really need a differentiated program as early as age three and four. The differentiation is necessary due to the differences in the gifted child's physical, academic, and intellectual development and their varying attention spans. Additionally, gifted children may need less teacher directed instruction. Gifted young learners also need a safe place to grow, learn, and explore where they can develop an understanding and acceptance of their own capabilities and limitations. (pp. 56).

Burns and Tunnard (1991) implored educators to know and understand the characteristics of gifted young learners in order to better meet their needs. They looked at the early work of Piaget's 1937 theory of cognitive development.

Piaget's (1937) theory of cognitive development stated that:

> elementary students are developing and using language to think about things and events in past, present, and future terms – processing associated with the more sophisticated development of the prefrontal cortex. . . . They are learning to understand and contextualize abstract ideas, make rational judgments, ask questions, and explain their thought process. (Heacox & Cash, 2014, p. 36)

Heacox and Cash (2014) expanded on Piaget's definition of gifted learners, suggesting that the characteristics of gifted elementary students include:

> use and understanding of elaborate language, drawing recognizable pictures, development of early writing skills, reading fluently by age four, independence in learning new things, numeracy (understanding number relationships), and a sense of task completion. (p. 36)

In addition, the authors also consider "typical" gifted characteristics to be:

> a strong desire to learn, an interest in experimenting and doing things differently, possess a wide range of interests, have a sense of wonder, are willing to take intellectual risks, may thrive in problem situations, have the ability to retain a great deal of information, may be able to learn skills more quickly and with less

> practice, will pursue individual interests, ask extensive or unusual questions, possess an unusually large vocabulary for their age, ability to read earlier than age mates, greater comprehension of the subtleties of language, demonstrate keen powers of observation, highly developed curiosity, longer attention span, ability to connect seemingly unrelated ideas in unique ways, show flexible thinking by being able to generate alternatives or generate several directions, show little patience for routine procedures and drills, have vivid imaginations, elaborate well, show creativity and originality in oral visual, musical, dramatic and drawing expression, can have a high degree of common sense, may mature at different rates than age peers (asynchrony), demonstrate leadership abilities, sensitivity toward self and others, and have an unusual sense of humor. (p. 30)

Montessori established the nature and needs of children in early 20th century in Italy (Berk, 2009). In Montessori-inspired schools, value is placed on encouraging the growth of self-motivated, independent children by balancing active, self-directed learning with small group collaboration and peer teaching. Classes are comprised of a range of ages and abilities. "Older, more experienced children take on the role of peer mentors, reinforcing their own skills and experiencing the responsibilities of leadership through helping others." (Berk, 2009, p. 637). More than 100 years ago, it was acceptable to have mixed age groups learn together. Colorado is calling for this mixed age approach with early access.

Hertzog (2008) provided a comprehensive list of cognitive characteristics of the young gifted child, including:

> alertness in infancy, faster pace in reaching motor development milestones, early language development, advanced vocabulary, complex speech patterns, interest in alphabet and symbols, intense curiosity, sustained attention, abstract thinking, ability to transfer knowledge, generates original ideas, creative/imaginative, excellent memory, and may be an early reader (Hertzog, 2008, p.6.)

Hertzog (2008) went on to describe the social and emotional characteristics that may be seen, including: early empathy development, emotional intensity/sensitivity, frustration with own limitations, concerns with truth and fair play, early awareness of difference,

mature sense of humor, perfectionism, and leader in cooperative play (p. 6). Similarly, the NAGC described the characteristics of young gifted children to include: the use of advanced vocabulary and/or the development of early reading skills, keen observation and curiosity, an unusual retention of information, periods of intense concentration, an early demonstration of talent in arts, task commitment beyond same-age peers, and an ability to understand complex concepts, perceive relationships, and think abstractly (Clark, 2002; Smutney, 2000).

It is also important to add the concept of *asynchronous development* when describing the characteristics of a young gifted child (Silverman, 1997). Silverman, (1993) described the concept:

> Asynchrony gauges the degree to which the rate of children's cognitive development is "in synch" with their rates of physical, social, and emotional development, as well as the extent to which children are facile in their manipulation of abstract symbols and concepts. (p. 459)

Heacox and Cash (2014) suggested that

> some gifted students prefer older students as intellectual peers and friends due to their advance cognitive development. . . . With gifted kindergarten and first grade students, we can admit them into kindergarten early or accelerate them to first grade or second grade. This option works best for meeting the academic and social needs of students who are developmentally mature (p. 53)

Acceleration

Colangelo and Davis (2003) stated, "early entrance to kindergarten or first grade allows children who are ready for the academic rigors and structure of school to encounter learning that may be challenging" (p. 166). Peters et al. (2014), on the topic of acceleration indicated, "repetition wastes valuable time that could be spent learning new

material" (p. 85). "Acceleration (especially whole grade) is one of the least consistently utilized strategies among those approaches the field of gifted education knows are effective, for meeting the needs of academically advanced learners" (Peters et al., 2014, p. 86). Peters et al. (2014) also referred to the work of Colangelo et al. (2004) and Southern and Jones (2004) when Colangelo et al. categorized *acceleration* as full-grade or partial-grade (i.e., subject-based) approaches:

> Full grade approaches may include early entrance to kindergarten first grade, middle school, high school or college; grade skipping and continuous-progress or self-paced instructional models, both of which allow for individuals to progress through the curriculum at a rate faster than that of their age-level peer. (Peters et al., 2014, p. 87).

Peters et al. (2014) continued by stating that grade skipping does not mean skipping the curriculum and content of the grade, because the students who are full-grade accelerated or admitted to school early have already mastered the content being skipped or compacted.

The NAGC (2006) published a position paper on acceleration, stating:

> Educational acceleration is one of the cornerstones of exemplary gifted education practices, with more research supporting this intervention than any other in the literature on gifted individuals. The practice of educational acceleration has long been used to match high level student general ability and specific talent with optimal learning opportunities.

The NAGC (2006) identified myths circulating about acceleration, one being that it was socially harmful to gifted students:

> Academically gifted students often feel bored or out of place with their age peers and naturally gravitate towards older students who are more similar as intellectual peers. Studies have shown that many students are happier with older students who share their interest than they are with children the same age. Therefore, acceleration placement options such as early entrance to kindergarten, grade skipping, or early exit should be considered for these students.

The NAGC supports differentiated programming to meet the needs of gifted learners.

Acceleration and early entrance internationally. Researchers have examined the needs and programming options for gifted young learners in such countries as the United States, Canada, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom. The majority of this literature has examined grade skipping and early entrance to college for academically advanced students. Koshy and Pascal (2011), for example, addressed the academic needs of gifted learners 4–7 years of age, and which specific programming would increase engagement in their areas of academic strength. The authors argued that more research is needed to understand the effects of early entry and how giftedness is sustained over time.

Colangelo et al. (2009) implored educators to use acceleration as an appropriate intervention: "Acceleration is an intervention that moves students through an educational program at rates faster, or at younger ages, than typical. It means matching the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum to the readiness and motivation of the student" (p. 81). Smutney et al. (2007) further support this view: "Children who are academically and emotionally ready, can begin their formal schooling at a chronological age younger than the chronological age stipulated by district or state policy" (p. 8). Kanevesky further wrote: "Acceleration is consistently identified as an essential feature of education for these highly able students," since it has a stronger body of research evidence supporting its effectiveness than any other intervention in gifted education. As a result, acceleration is considered a "cornerstone of exemplary gifted education practices" (NAGC, 2004, p. 1).

Brody and Benbow (1987) established early on that "because the controversy over the effects of acceleration continues to exist, a long-term evaluation is needed" (p. 105).

In this study, the authors compared the social and emotional status of accelerated and nonaccelerated high school students at the same grade level. Many studies have looked at acceleration in middle school to high school or high school to early college entrance. Of particular note in this article was a reference to MENSA membership: "For society as a whole, it [acceleration] offers the promise of stimulating gifted youth to achieve more at a younger age and, thus be more productive members of society for more years" (p. 109).

Gagné and Gagnier (2004) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Canada examining 36 students who were admitted to school early for kindergarten and followed until second grade. The authors engaged the teachers of these 36 students for feedback about the students' social and emotional adjustments to school, but fell short of including the parents' feedback. Overall, the authors found "a gulf between what research has revealed and what most practitioners believe" (p. 128). A reluctance on the part of educators still exists to engage in acceleration except in rare cases.

Kanevsky and Clelland (2013) further examined Canadian legislation governing provincial schools' policy and practice for gifted learners. Specifically, the authors reviewed policy around grade acceleration for highly advanced students, finding

> the language used in explicit government policies can either mandate or permit action. For example, policies that used 'must' indicate that decision-makers are mandated or required to act as specified. In contrast, those that used permissive language, such as the word 'may,' permit, but do not require, decision-makers to act in a particular way. (Kanevsky & Clelland, 2013, p. 232)

As for early entrance to kindergarten in Canada, only Ontario included early entrance in its provincial education documents (Kanevsky & Clelland, 2013, p. 251). Kanevsky and Clelland (2013) also noted there was no language specifically prohibiting acceleration; however, administrators in the province of Prince Edward Island were cautioned against

acceleration: “Please note: acceleration through the curriculum can present significant challenges for teachers and schools and is not the preferred option for meeting the needs of gifted and talented students” (p. 47). Teacher concerns about students’ social and emotional well-being is a noted issue, leading Neihart to ask: “Maybe we should study why so many educators are so unwilling to try academic acceleration?” (Bower, 1990, p. 212).

There are known concerns around whole-grade acceleration, grade skipping, and early entrance to school (Colangelo et al, 2004; Assouline et al, 2015). Adults are reluctant to move a child ahead of age peers fearing social and emotional damage, lack of success, and inability to adjust. However, Rogers (1991) argues that “social and psychological adjustment is neither enhanced nor threatened by early entrance to school” (p. 201).

Hoogeveen (2015) compared acceleration practices across 27 European countries, finding the options for acceleration varied greatly, and some acceleration was done without benefit of policy or without approval from decision makers. Notably, teachers in the Netherlands expressed favorable opinions about acceleration, and those that had been to trainings and had information about acceleration were more likely to support this approach for gifted students. Moving to the southern hemisphere, Gross (1986) examined radical acceleration in Australia where students there had experienced a combination of full-grade acceleration, subject-level acceleration, and curriculum compacting. Gross (1986) found that “those accelerated possessed a high level of intelligence, were highly motivated to learn, were independent, were seeking a desire to be intellectually stimulated, and they were motivated to learn and achieve” (p. 95).

As part of an effort to identify young gifted children for a specialized preschool program in Taiwan aimed at developing problem-solving skills, Kuo, Maker, Su, and Hu (2010) used Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences to identify specific areas of strength. The authors described how the selection committee used parent checklists, teacher checklists, portfolio assessments, group intelligence tests, play observations, and individual intelligence test results. Students selected remained in the program for up to three years. The authors emphasized the important role parents played in early identification.

Acceleration and early entrance in the United States. The NAGC (2015a) reported 33 states do not have early entrance policies or do not permit early entrance; only eight states have legislation and detailed policy for early entrance into school. Out of the eight states with legislation for early entrance, six states' policies are not under the umbrella of gifted education. Only two states, Wisconsin and Colorado, have early access legislation (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]; Minnesota Statutes, section 124 D.02, Subdivision 1). Both require identification as "highly gifted learners," as monitored through state accountability annual reviews.

In United States, the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa has dedicated continued study for and about gifted learners including the topics of programming for their needs and acceleration. Both the text of *A Nation Deceived* (2004), and *A Nation Empowered* (2015) feature chapters dedicated to the topic of early entrance for underage gifted learners. The 2015 report has an entire chapter dedicated to whole-grade acceleration and early entrance to kindergarten and first grade (Assouline et al.) Here, the authors write about the necessity for a process, that parental involvement is needed, and

the use of ability and achievement assessment tools should be appropriate for young learners. They also mentioned the underuse of early entrance to kindergarten and first grade as an educational option (Lupinski-Shoplik, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2015).

Rogers' (1991) meta-analysis provided a most comprehensive review of acceleration practices in the field of gifted education. Rogers (1991) work is considered seminal in the study of acceleration. Early entrance to school was one of 12 methods of acceleration delineated in her study: "Early entrance is a reasonably safe decision to make. Across a broad base of short-term and longitudinal studies based primarily on school records, academic performance was found to be significantly enhanced. Social and psychological adjustment is neither enhanced nor threatened by early entrance to school" (p. 201). This research serves to dispel belief that early access is harmful as indicated earlier in the NAGC (2006) myths.

Currently, there is no formal national policy on acceleration. However, the NAGC and the Institute for Research and Policy crafted a policy statement on acceleration in 2009. The resulting report showed that kindergarten age of entry differs widely from Age five by June first to Age five by December 31 across the United States (NAGC, 2009). With a six month age spread of starting ages, June to December, it is possible that a child may start kindergarten or first grade in one state then move to a neighboring state where they may be denied entrance because they do not meet that state's age requirement. This inconsistency could prove to be problematic. Currently, Colorado and Minnesota have developed specific state laws through statutes that allow for early access for underaged children into kindergarten and first grade (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]; Minnesota Statutes, section 124 D.02, Subdivision 1).

According to the NAGC State of the State Report (2015), only 15 states and the District of Columbia require kindergarten attendance before enrolling in first grade. Thirty-five states do not have a kindergarten requirement. Twenty-six states require children to attend school by Age 6. Fourteen states require students to attend school by Age 7. In eight states—Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia plus Washington, DC—the compulsory age to start school is 5. Pennsylvania and Washington require children to attend school at Age eight (NAGC, 2015a). Barriers to acceleration have also been noted (NAGC, 2015a):

- Nine states have policy permitting acceleration of students.
- Twenty-two states leave the acceleration decision to school districts.
- Sixteen states prohibit students from starting kindergarten early.
- Thirteen states expressly prohibited students from entering kindergarten early.
- Three states prohibit dual enrollment in which middle school students are also enrolled in high school.
- Seventeen states do not collect demographic data about the gifted student population or acceleration.
- No states report on academic performance and/or learning growth for identified gifted students.
- Fifteen states include the number of identified gifted students in the district report card.

There is no consistent national start date for school or a compulsory date when a child must attend school. This leaves the decisions to the individual states. Colorado has both a kindergarten age minimum and a first-grade age minimum. In addition, Colorado

has the early access legislation in place to support younger kindergarten and first grade ready students.

Acceleration and early entrance in Colorado. Colorado has legislation to support early access to kindergarten and first grade, however the legislation remains optional (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]). A search of the CDE website provided no state policy in Colorado for broader grade acceleration. The CDE stated:

> highly advanced gifted children under age six defines that four year olds have access to kindergarten or five year olds have access to first grade for a child who may benefit from Early Access as a "highly advanced gifted child." (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [13]).

"This child is academically gifted, socially and emotionally mature, in the top two percent or less of the gifted peer group, motivated to learn, ready for advanced placement, and has exhausted the resources of preschool or home schooling" (CDE, 2016). Children appropriate for early access are exceptionally precocious and ready for school (CDE, 2016). "Academic achievement, reasoning ability, performance and motivation are keen compared to other gifted children" (CDE, 2016). Early access is a form of grade acceleration that simply comes at the very start of a young child's school career rather than grade skipping or whole-grade acceleration to meet their educational needs after kindergarten or first grade (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [13]).

Colorado is one of two states in the United States that has specific state guidelines for evaluating, enrolling, and progress monitoring early access students in public schools. Colorado House Bill 08-1021, signed into law in 2008, remains part of statutory law, though it remains an optional piece of legislation. Not all school districts take advantage of this option for gifted young learners in their population areas. An aspect of Colorado

House Bill 08-1021 called "portability" states that if one Colorado school district identifies and admits a child to school under the guidelines of the early access legislation, and the child moves to a neighboring school district in the Colorado, the new district must accept the child without further testing or a wait period (C.S.L. Law 22-20-204[2]).

The CDE Exceptional Student Services Division released a reference booklet in 2008 as part of their reference materials, which was revised in 2016. The document was intended as a training tool, as the first 10 pages were copies of slides generated and used during initial face-to-face training sessions led by CDE gifted personnel in 2008 and 2009. Also included in this detailed document were suggested tools that could be used to measure young gifted children's aptitude, achievement, readiness, and performance. Sample parent checklists were included in the guidebook (CDE, 2017).

The *Fast Facts* sheet (CDE, 2014; see Appendix E) provides a two-page synopsis of the salient points of the House Bill 08-1021 information. It clarifies the impact to individual Colorado school districts and the fees that could be assessed for each child evaluated through the process (CDE, 2016). The *Fast Facts* also provides information about the timeline to which districts must adhere and specific rules that must be followed in order for the district to receive state funding for the child enrolled early into kindergarten or first grade (CDE, 2016). Stated most clearly are the areas of ability and achievement that must be met (at the 97th percentile or above) as compared to age peers (CDE, 2016). Colorado House Bill 08-1021 required AUs to consider "aptitude, achievement, performance, readiness for advanced placement, observable social behavior, motivation to learn, and support from parents, teachers, and school administration" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]). In addition, the *Fast Facts* included

process elements—HB 08-1021 required the rules to include "a published timeline, involved personnel, evaluation of a body of evidence, decision making, and progress monitoring of each student's performance after early access admission" (CDE, 2016, p. 5).

Assouline et al. (2009) drafted the Iowa Acceleration Scales [IAS], a set of procedures widely accepted in the field of gifted education as an approach to gathering a body of evidence necessary for decision making by student study teams when a full-grade acceleration or early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for a child is being considered (Assouline et al., 2009). The IAS tool requires a team to consider academic ability, aptitude, and achievement; social and developmental factors, leadership; and the interpersonal skills of the child; as well as the supports that are in place to assist the child at home, in school, and in their extended family (Assouline et al., 2009). All of these factors have a score range. The total points in the 10 areas help the student study teams to determine if early entrance to school, whole-grade acceleration, or single-subject acceleration is the best approach for the student under consideration (Assouline et al., 2009). Through this means, the IAS attempts to quantify an otherwise "gut-level feeling," an emotional and very important school decision (Assouline et al., 2009).

Using the research from the IAS (Assouline et al., 2009) and research of *A Nation Deceived* (Colangelo, et al, 2004), Colorado approved the revised ECEA rules and regulations regarding early access during the 2015 legislative session (CDE, 2015, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]). New requirements for filing an early access addendum were released to state directors for gifted education professionals in April 2016. The new rules for early access went into effect for the 2016–2017 academic year. Included in the new CDE

guidance document were the complete subset of the ECEA rules pertaining to gifted education in general and early access specifically. Detailed information about progress monitoring, Advanced Learning Plan [ALP] development, and assessments were also included. A brief bulleted list of required steps to creating a district early access addendum were provided. The required steps are set in place within the statute to ensure thorough evaluation of a young gifted learner (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.02 [h]). HB 08-1021 states within the purpose:

> Early access is intended to support students who are evaluated to be exceptional in aptitude/cognitive reasoning, academics, school readiness and motivation. Drawing from the research, the guidance document goes on to state, benefits to students who qualify for early access include: Integrating early childhood and gifted educational programming to expand access to curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned to the child's level of challenge. (CDE, 2016, p. 4)

The Colorado evaluation process is bound by specific timelines and must include screening a portfolio; a parent letter of referral; a body of evidence that should contain ability, achievement, and readiness indicators; a determination team to review the body of evidence; and a determination letter sent to parents. Once a student is accepted for early access, an Advanced Learning Plan must be written within 30 days of the first day of school (CDE, 2016).

Colorado early access also requires parental involvement and encourages ongoing communication between school and home through the ALP (CDE, 2016). Early childhood educators and family members play powerful and critical roles in establishing and supporting learning environments at home, in community settings, and in traditional school settings (Feinburg & Mindess, 1994; Smutney, 1998). These contexts vary and require the active participation of caring adults to recognize and nurture children's

strengths, interests, and abilities. In the guidelines, "Parents or guardian(s) are allowed open communication about the policy and procedures. Written consent is required from parents or legal guardian(s) in order to evaluate the referred student for possible acceleration placement" (Assouline et al., 2015, p. 251). Smutney (2000) stated, "Since about 80% of the parent population can identify their children's giftedness by ages four or five, a shortcut to finding these students is to consult with their parents" (p. 1).

Acceleration risk factors. What happens when schools do nothing to meet the needs of gifted learners? Heacox and Cash (2014) suggested that if the needs of children are not met, the results may appear in such measures as: total lower test scores, inferior student performance, impertinence, disruptiveness, underachievement, parental pressure, depression, insecurity and loss of social connectedness, and a loss of academic confidence (p. 39). Neihart, Reis, Robinson, and Moon (2002) also stated, "Failure to identify and develop talent in very young children has been linked to subsequent negative outcomes in cognitive, academic, social, and affective development." Researchers for years have built a strong case that early identification and programming supports gifted young learners as noted by Kuo et al., 2010.

> The earlier gifted children are identified and provided appropriate programs, the better their chances of fully actualizing their potential. . . . On the contrary, when young gifted children fail to be challenged during their early years in school and in family situations, they tend to develop negative feelings towards school and develop poor work habits, and then become underachievers." (Kuo et al., 2010)

Assouline et al. (2015) reflected on the decade of study between 2004 when *A Nation Deceived* was published and *A Nation Empowered* (2105) was published, only to realize that little has changed in the acceptance of early access as a successful approach to meeting the needs of gifted young learners.

Assouline et al. (2015) found that

> one disheartening aspect of the past decade, has been the continued bias against acceleration—that so many people including educators continue to believe acceleration is bad for students, that it is bad to push kids, that it will hurt them socially. Some continue to argue that age trumps aptitude—except in sports and music where early ability is recognized and nurtured. (pp. 59-60)

Though Colangelo et al., (2004) and Assouline et al. (2015) have been strong advocates for gifted learners in recent decades, their studies are not considering a new topic. "As early as 1930, Terman and his colleagues (Burks, Jensen, & Terman, 1930), in a landmark longitudinal study of 1,528 intellectually gifted children, warned that exceptionally gifted and profoundly gifted students are children at risk" (Gross, 2006, p. 405). At the same time, Hollingsworth (1931) was engaged in the most significant study of exceptional intellectual potential undertaken to date: following a group of young people from the early years of grade school through university.

Through Hollingworth's (1931) long-term look at these students, Hollingsworth drew the correlation that gifted students who received subject acceleration or whole-grade acceleration pursued advanced degrees and engaged in more fulfilling careers than gifted students who did not accelerate. The two studies, Burks, Jensen, & Terman, (1930) and Hollingworth (1931) share their understanding of the positive outcomes of early access, and the greater potential for children who are exceptional and have grade advancement. They both state that exceptionally gifted children are just as much at risk of failure as struggling students if they do not have their needs met at an early age.

Coleman and Cross (2001) indicated gifted students need opportunities to be together with their intellectual peers, no matter their differences, and the earlier gifted children are identified and provided appropriate programs, the better their chances of

fully actualizing their potential. Inversely, Karnes & Johnson, (1990) indicate that when young gifted children fail to be challenged during their early years in school and family situations, they tend to develop negative feelings toward school and develop poor work habits, and then become underachievers (Karnes & Johnson, 1990, p. 131–138).

Gallagher (2004) reviewed public policy and acceleration of gifted students and found the factors in states' lack of action to write acceleration policy were cost, lack of personnel, researched evidence, public beliefs, and educator views. Gallagher further specified that the costs were minimal, no additional personnel were needed to advance a child to the next grade, the research on grade acceleration was highly positive, but public beliefs and educators' views were generally negative. As such, acceleration of any kind is often a contentious option for advanced learners due to concerns for students' well-being however, nearly 100 years of research examining the effects educational acceleration on academic, social, and emotional development has provided consistent evidence of its benefits when it is based on comprehensive assessment and planning (Colangelo et al., 2004a, 2004b; Kulik & Kulik, 1984a, 1984b; Rogers, 1991; Kanevsky & Clelland, 2013).

Reasons behind the reluctance to accelerate students include fears about students' social and emotional development or readiness to be placed with older learners, and fears that "if we let one student do this, then everyone will want it" (Assouline et al, 2015). The belief that students should be educated with others of the same age was not prevalent until the mid-to-late 19th century, gradually reaching conformity in the early part of the 20th century. As early as 1920, Henry suggested: Instead of holding a rigid scheme of graduation, adjusted to the theoretical average age to which all children must be made to conform, those who are in charge of public school systems are coming to see the

advisability of making a more flexible arrangement and a more careful adjustment to the varying aptitudes and capacities of the members of the school population.

Such proposals were countered by assertions that doing so would endanger students' social and emotional well-being (Daurio, 1979). In the 1990s, the U.S. National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994/2005) stated that "grouping children by age should become a thing of the past" (Kanevsky & Clelland, 2013, p. 236).

Cost is another reason why some schools will not accelerate students. Callahan and Hertberg-Davis (2013) stated:

> Schools do not even have to have a formal gifted program to use acceleration. Schools can and do employ acceleration and using acceleration does not require identification as 'gifted' or hiring special teachers or creating pullout or having any ordinary trappings of traditional gifted programs with additional costs. If students are capable of working well beyond the level of their age peers in a subject area, they can simply be allowed to do so; there is no reason to have a gifted program *per se*. (p. 73)

This research suggests that if a teacher or teaching team knows a student needs more advanced material or higher level standards, it is incumbent upon them to provide it. Plucker (2013) further identified the factors of poverty, limited resources, and negative perceptions of gifted programs as additional persistent challenges for delivery of services for gifted students in rural schools. Though rural school districts and urban and suburban districts have different funding concerns, gifted students' needs must still be addressed (Plucker, 2013). The literature on rural education describes numerous insufficiencies in gifted education programming arising from a lack of funding (Plucker, 2013).

Fear and lack of knowledge about early entrance to school specifically and gifted education best practices in general remain further areas of concern. However, it is vital that fear or lack of knowledge not prevent grade skipping, when evidence suggests it is

appropriate (Peters et al., 2014). In Steenbergen-Hu and Moon's (2011) meta-analysis, they stated that "the bottom line is, that when implemented correctly, acceleration, whether partial or full grade, works very effectively to increase student learning without undesirable emotional consequences" (p. 86).

Reporting acceleration. School districts, state departments of education, and the country as a whole look at many types of data for students. The USDE knows how many students attend public schools, private schools, parochial and charter schools, and how many students are registered as home school students annually. States collect individual student test data, and states consider student scores by district. The number of days a student is marked tardy or absent from school each year is also collected. Data on the number and type of vocational courses offered per school year and the number of students who avail themselves of these offerings are tracked. Districts know how many students are identified as gifted learners. However, in most states, there is limited to nonexistent levels of reporting and oversight of what school districts are doing to serve high ability students (NAGC, 2015). No reporting is required to share acceleration data, for tracking early entrance for kindergarten and first grade other than in Colorado and Minnesota. No national collection of early access data is available. Nationally, we know how many students drop out of high school or earn a GED annually. National statistics rely on the states' tracking and accurate reporting. What is missing are local state and national reports that show the number of students who have been subject accelerated, whole-grade accelerated, and enter college early with or without having earned a high school diploma.

Colorado uses electronic reporting, referred to as the data pipeline or Data Management System (DMS). Administrative units in Colorado report a variety of student information. The DMS pulls specific state-required fields of information coded into each student's online record. Demographic data is collected for age, gender, ethnicity, free or reduced meal status, coding for Individualized Education Plans, 504 Plans, Individual Literacy Plans, ALPs, and English Language Learner Plans status. School start and end dates are verified and per-student funding from the state to districts are calculated based on DMS data collection. All scores for state-required testing are housed within the DMS. The only acceleration data collected through the DMS is taken during the time an early access is in kindergarten or first grade and the district is seeking per-pupil funding for the underage child (CDE, 2016). This reporting was legislated as a requirement in rules established for early access (CDE, 2015, CRS 12.08[2]). If a student is grade advanced again, above first grade, during their school attendance time through the completion of Grade 12, that acceleration data is not recorded or reported to the state.

Gap in the Literature

Rogers' (1991) meta-analysis analyzed 12 methods of acceleration: early entrance to school, grade skipping, nongraded classroom, curriculum compaction, grade telescoping, concurrent enrollment, subject acceleration, advanced placement, mentorship, credit by examination, early admission to college, and combined acceleration options. A gap in literature exists on the concentrated successes of early access over time in a single state where hundreds of students have been served by the legislation (CDE, 2016). Since Colorado leads the nation with specific enacted early access legislation, Colorado provided the ideal place to conduct this study. The results of this study will add

to the body of knowledge about early entrance to kindergarten and first grade in a concentrated area, Colorado since 2008.

To date there has not been a study conducted in the state of Colorado examining the positive factors that influence a school district or AU to establish an early access policy and process. Similarly, there has been no data collection on the factors that have prevented Colorado school districts from initiating a process to make public education available early for gifted young learners. State data exists only on the number of school districts who received funding for underage students over the last three years (CDE, 2016).

There were studies about teacher perceptions (Bower, 1990), but none were discovered that looked longitudinally at children who were identified as gifted and admitted to kindergarten and first grade ahead of age peers in one state. The research discussed earlier in this chapter indicated teachers and administrators remain reluctant to use early access for fear of social and emotional misplacement despite research to the contrary (Colangelo et al, 2004; Assouline et al, 2015; Rogers 1991). Now that early access legislation has been in place in the state of Colorado through CSL 22-20-204(2) for eight years, it is imperative to study the successes of early access processes that have opened the doors of schools for these gifted young learners.

Summary

Discussed in this literature review were the topics of early access and acceleration. Provided were several definitions of giftedness from a variety of theorists. The initial definitions of DOI (Rogers, 2003), the theoretical framework, were explored as well as the guiding literature available about Colorado's gifted process and practice

(CDE, 2016). To date, not all districts in Colorado have engaged a process for early access. Based on the literature presented and its gaps, there remains room for further study and understanding.

Overall, this literature has highlighted a variety of acceleration options for advanced students. High school and precollegiate options are well documented. Single-subject advancement in mathematics, world languages, and literature are also documented as common practices used in middle and high schools. Occasionally, dual enrollments were suggested for middle school to high school or high school to college courses. Frequently mentioned were advanced art classes for artistically talented students available in cooperation with community-based programs, and music lessons for the young and precocious were options, but rarely was there a mention to measure, observe, and place highly advanced gifted young children into school ahead of age peers (CDE, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter two, presented a review of literature on the topic of early entrance to school and the Colorado-specific early access legislation. The literature examined what defines a young gifted child, and reviewed acceleration nationally and internationally, specifically early entrance as a method to meet the needs of young gifted learners ahead of age peers entering kindergarten and first grade. The literature highlighted Minnesota and Colorado as the two states that specifically allow early entrance. The literature review ultimately supported acceleration, establishing the foundation for this study considering the positive aspects of implementing early access processes in Colorado.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the positive aspects of early access processes according to those currently implementing an early access addendum. Participants were asked about their understanding of early access legislation and best practices in evaluating and placing gifted young learners. Further explored were the compelling reasons AUs elected to engage in an early access process. Using Rogers (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory may help clarify why and how AUs learned about Early Access and began to adopt it as an innovation. Investigating the perceptions of current practitioners implementing early access addendum and reviewing the current addendum documents filed with the CDE as well as three years of funding data led to the

formulation of the findings, which will be shared with the study's community partner, the CDE Director for Gifted Education.

Research Questions

The study focused on two central questions: (a) What are the most important aspects of early access processes according to those implementing early access? and (b) What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful early access process in Colorado? The problem in practice of limited districts in Colorado who have adopted the early access legislation and implemented a process is considered further in this methodology section.

Research Design

This study utilized a nonexperimental, retrospective mixed-methods approach to gather the perceptions of early access success from gifted education professionals using an early access process to evaluate, identify, and admit gifted young learners ahead of neurotypical age peers. A phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) was further layered over the mixed method of data collection, and used to tell the shared story of the current AU leadership using an early access process to identify and admit gifted young learners, while maintaining their anonymity (Creswell, 2013; Fowler, 2014; Gliner et al., 2009).

This study was conducted between September 2016 and January 2017. Creswell indicates "Using a mixed method allows researchers to rely on more than one data source" (Creswell, 2009). "Mixed methods involve combining or integration of qualitative and quantitative research and data in the research study" (Creswell, 2013, p.

45). As Creswell (2014) states, “While mixed methods is a newer research approach, increasing use since the mid-1980s, it allows for multiple collections of data from various sources to develop stronger support of the research and problem to create a solution” (p. 14). In the case of this study, the combination of document review and survey analysis combined to tell a full story of early access successes in Colorado. This combination of data neutralized the weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative data through convergence (Creswell, 2013). This may lead to greater impact for the community partner and Colorado school leadership. A phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) was further layered over the mixed method of data collection (Creswell, 2013; Fowler, 2014; Gliner et al., 2009).

Three main data sources were used. Initially, reviewed were the Colorado early access addenda. These documents are public information available via the CDE website (CDE, 2016). The second data source was early access funding and enrollment datasets for the 2012–2013, 2013–2014, and 2014–2015 school years (CDE, 2016). The third data source was an online electronic survey sent to 31 AUs that had an approved early access addendum filed with the CDE. The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. Creswell, (2003) indicates that one benefit of using a quantitative approach is that it provides a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Open-ended survey questions were also asked. Fowler (2014) stated that open-ended questions “permit the researcher to obtain answers that were unanticipated” (p. 88).

Setting and Participants

Each AU in Colorado has an annual opportunity to submit an addendum to the CDE for approval. Currently there are 31 AUs in Colorado that have such a plan in place. It was this population of 31 AUs that was included in the survey distribution. The artifact review materials were downloaded from the CDE website with the assistance of the CDE Director for Gifted Education. The retrospective portion of this study included a document review of 31 early access addenda or process applications. Three years of funding data for early access (2012–2015) were also reviewed, provided by the CDE Director for Gifted Education. The data detailed the funding for both kindergarten and first grade early access enrollments. The funding data and documents reviewed completed the retrospective portion of the study.

The second part of the study was conducted using a self-administered 18 item online survey tool, constructed by the researcher and distributed to 31 Colorado AUs in October 2016. The district or AU-level leadership responsible for gifted programming comprised the respondents to the survey. They respondents were nonrandom by way of their selection and represented the gifted leadership named in the Colorado CDE database or their designee, or one Colorado school district or AU with a formal early access addendum filed with the CDE. For the purpose of this study, their names and their district names were not revealed. The survey link was sent to each individual participant. Each invitation had a specific link. It was not open to the public. Only the gifted lead or their designee could complete the survey.

The reasons for selecting an online survey method included the low cost of the data collection, the potential for a fast response, and the fact that respondents could take their time or consult with others in their AUs as they completed the survey (Fowler,

2014). The purpose of the survey was to collect the perceptions of the respondents about the importance of early access as well as their reasons for adopting the legislation for their AU. The survey results were collected utilizing Qualtrics and maintained there for later data analysis and review.

Data Collection

Artifact review. The artifact review looked at 31 early access addenda filed with the CDE. Each addendum was given a code that was in no way connected to their state assigned district number. This was done as an additional measure of anonymity. According to Gliner et al. (2009), "Anonymity means the participant's name and other identifiers, such as social security or school ID number are not known nor cannot be deduced by the researcher or others" (p. 194). Great care was taken to suppress all identifiable district specific data to protect the anonymity of the districts reviewed.

When reviewing the early access addenda, similarities and differences in the individual early access processes were charted. The artifact review was independent of the survey launch, in that it did not have to be done prior to the survey deployment and continued throughout the study. As the documents were read, attention was paid to the submission dates for each district's addendum. This information related to DOI theory (Rogers, 2003). Also noted were the number of districts that were included with each addendum. The name of the addendum submitter was noted only to identify if that person was still serving in the capacity of district gifted lead. The names were then cross-referenced to the 2017 CDE database and recorded by assigned code. Also noted were the fees reported by each AU charged for early access candidates' evaluation.

State datasets. The CDE Director for Gifted Education provided data concerning early access funding and enrollment for three school years (2012–2013, 2013–2014, 2014–2015). The data provided the number of early access kindergarten and early access first grade students. Also, provided by CDE was the most current list of AUs with early access addenda on file. Securing the copies was facilitated by community partner, Colorado Department of Education, Director for Gifted Education.

Survey instrument. The data were collected through an online electronic survey deployed via Qualtrics to all Colorado school district gifted education leaders responsible for gifted programming and budget reporting who currently had an early access addendum filed with the CDE ($N = 31$). The survey contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. The survey questions included close-ended, forced, single-response questions; yes/no questions; Likert scale questions; as well as open-ended short answer questions. The survey was completed anonymously in less than 15 minutes on a computer or handheld device via Qualtrics.

The response rate was calculated based on the possibility of 31 Colorado AUs which had the opportunity to complete the survey. The goal in collecting the survey data was to grasp trends about early access success from across the state.

Initially, the quantitative portion of the study began with an introductory e-mail sent to the district gifted directors across the state. The intent of the introductory e-mail was to let potential participants know about the purpose of the study, and to invite participants to take part in the research study. As Dillman et al. (2014) suggested, "it is a good idea to engage potential respondents with respondent-friendly questions that accommodate their concerns and interest" (p. 20). The opportunity to provide narrative

responses to several survey questions that included their success, were provided in the open-ended questions. This helped the district gifted personnel across the state find reasons to respond. Also included in the e-mail was a statement that their participation was completely voluntary, as well as text indicating the survey link would be sent a week later, so they could plan their participation. Dillman et al. (2014) also suggested it would be beneficial to send an e-mail that expressed appreciation of the participants. A field pretest was also conducted with a similar survey for the purpose of finding out how the data collection protocol and survey instrument worked under realistic conditions (Fowler, 2014).

The survey distribution took place one week after the initial e-mail was sent. The survey recipient list was derived from the CDE-maintained database. An online survey method provided the most cost effective way to survey this population (Dillman et al., 2014). The survey was deployed using the approved University of Denver Qualtrics system, a secure online platform with an equally secure data management tool that allowed for real-time data collection and storage. By using the online tool, the risk of data input error was eliminated. All survey responses were input directly into Qualtrics by the respondents and stored in a cloud-based secure system for later analysis.

"The decision to respond to a self-administered web or email survey is typically made in the first day or two with many members deciding almost immediately whether to respond" (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 25). This was evident in my results as 11 of the 21 total respondents completed the survey on day one or two. The survey was made available for four weeks. One thank you note and reminder was sent via e-mail after two weeks. The

tone of the reminder e-mail was appreciative to those who had completed the survey, and provided a measure of urgency and thankfulness to potential new respondents.

In the survey, the most critical questions were asked first following Dillman et al.'s (2014) recommendation that regardless of survey method, the most critical questions should be asked at the onset of the survey in case the respondent decides to abort the survey before answering all of the questions. The first page of the survey contained the University of Denver Institutional Review Board's (IRB) Consent Form. It disclosed pertinent information to the participants, including the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, risks or discomforts, benefits, incentives, study costs, alternatives, confidentiality, questions, and contact information for both the researcher and her faculty advisor (See Appendix B). At the bottom of the page, each participant selected "yes" to give consent or "no" to deny consent. If consent was given, the participant was then moved on to the survey. If consent was not given, the skip logic within the Qualtrics program was activated and the participant was exited from the survey. Once in the survey, participants could start and stop. They did not have to answer all questions in order to progress through the survey. Participants could also quit and exit the survey at any time, without consequence.

The survey contained 18 questions in total. The first five questions established the variables, years of experience with gifted education, longevity in the role of gifted lead in a school district, the regional response rate, and the student population density. The remaining questions sought information about current policy and practice around acceleration in general and early access more specifically. (See Appendix D for the full list of survey questions.)

Threats to validity. The survey respondents came to the survey with differing perspectives. Some respondents carried a personal bias about acceleration and may have responded from a personal perspective. Some respondents have multiple responsibilities in their district and may have responded from the perspective of what was best for their district, not the gifted young children residing in their district. Other respondents may have been strictly staffed to support gifted programming and answered with that perspective. Fowler (2014) acknowledges that bias exists in all surveys. It is the researcher's task to minimize bias by including a representative sampling of the entire population.

A concern may have existed among survey respondents that the responses would not remain anonymous as the researcher has known personal and collegial connections throughout the state of Colorado as a member of the Colorado Association for Gifted Children and the Gifted Education State Advisory Committee, as well as affiliation with the Association for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative. Though these connections may have initially served as an advantage, with increased numbers of responses, care was taken to not share specific data collected from individual school districts or personnel. Additional threats to validity may have come from respondents' reluctance to supply specific and detailed responses that could identify them personally or reveal the identity of their school district, thus limiting full responses.

The survey was only available online. Fowler (2014) suggested that: "When survey requests come from less known or unknown sources and go to people who vary widely in how and how much they use the Internet, results are predictably variable" (p. 52). Dillman et al. (2014) further stated, "Internet surveys face coverage problems as

Internet access remains lower than that of telephone surveys" (p. 61). Additionally, "spam filters can prevent large segments of the sample from receiving contacts altogether" (Dillman et al., 2014, p. 330). It is not known if filters in some of the AUs that did not respond, may have blocked my instrument, but the possibility remains.

Another concern was a possible diminished response rate or survey saturation due to the number of survey requests sent in a relatively close period of time to Colorado school district gifted education directors or their designees by my classmates and colleagues. Though the surveys differed in content and purpose, the number of requests may have contributed to reduced return rates. Additionally, some surveys may have contained similar or overlapping questions and created confusion that reduced response rates.

Data Analysis

After the 4-week collection period was complete, the survey data was analyzed to find what percent of the 31 Colorado AUs (population) responded. Other groups of data (variables) were also considered (i.e., size of district, years the district respondent had been in the gifted lead role, and geographic location in Colorado, number of years the district respondent had been in the field of gifted education, whether the respondents were endorsed in gifted education by the CDE).

The data collected were initially analyzed for mean, standard deviation, and range of variables. The purpose of analyzing the open-ended survey data was to look for the trends in the factors that influenced school district leadership when making decisions to engage in an early access process. Of the 31 potential AUs, there were 21 responses to the survey over the 1-month period, equaling a response rate of 67.77%.

Using a mixed-methods approach allowed the analysis of the survey and the document review data to be considered separately and together. The survey included several open-ended questions that were considered more qualitative in nature than the forced choice questions that were represented as pure quantifiable data (Creswell, 2003). The data was analyzed using the capabilities embedded within the Qualtrics system. In addition, data was downloaded into SPSS for further analysis. The ranking questions were also analyzed using Friedman's (1940) test to determine the most important items in a rank order question. The Shapiro-Wilks test was performed to test skewness and kurtosis. The Spearman Correlation test was run to verify the reliability between all pairs of raters using the data derived from the nonnormal distributions discovered as a result of the Shapiro-Wilks test. Also, Kendall's (1938) concordance test was performed to test the results between and among all raters.

With both qualitative and quantitative data collected, in the mixed-method approach, some of the qualitative data themes and codes can be transformed into quantitative numbers that could be compared (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative data was analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics (Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2011). Tables were used to display the quantifiable data collected in the survey and groups of items extracted from the early access addenda.

Creswell (2013) stated that "the process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information" (p. 184). The qualitative data collected from the document review were coded initially using *a priori* codes and, later, *in vivo* coding as specific themes and patterns emerged (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Anonymity was maintained at all times. The addenda were read several times and coded

for major themes with each successive reading, (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Once each addendum was coded, themes emerged.

A table was constructed to align like characteristics of each addendum, and provide details about the size and demographic regions each represents. A narrative first-person style was used to share the stories of the individual districts and weave their stories together (Seidman, 2013). The overall writing structure was guided by a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013), and incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative data, including quotes and excerpts from the document reviews, to describe the essence of participants lived experiences and to compare these experiences with the DOI model.

Conflict of Interest

Gliner et al. (2009) define a *conflict of interest* as when the interests of the participants or the researcher are in conflict with the interests of the study. No fees were collected or payment for research were paid to me. There are no known conflicts of interest in this study. My affiliation with Colorado Gifted State Advisory Committee (GSAC) does not create a conflict of interest.

Study Timeline

The study followed the timeline described in Table 1.

Table 1
Study Timeline

Date	Activity
April 2016	Established a community partnership with the Colorado Department of Education Director for Gifted Education (DGE).
May 2016	Met with community partner (DGE) to discuss ways the study could identify factors that positively influence Colorado school districts engaging an early access process that opens access to public school ahead of age peers for gifted young learners.

June 2016	Conducted informal discussions with community partner (DGE). Crafted e-mails for introduction, follow-up, and thanks to be sent to potential survey respondents. Created the online survey using Qualtrics (University of Denver).
July 2016	Made initial IRB submissions and revisions.
August 2016	Upon initial IRB feedback, made revisions and subsequently received IRB approval.
September 2016	Refined survey questions.
October 2016	Deployed initial e-mail invitation to participants in the study. Distributed the vetted statewide survey to the designated Colorado school district gifted education directors (Public information from CDE) via Qualtrics. Monitored initial survey responses. Sent follow up e-mails two weeks into the survey period. Began data analysis of early access addenda. Closed the survey tool.
December 2016– January 2017	Transcribed and coded qualitative data collected. Considered initial quantitative datasets.
February 2017– March 2017	Coded data from qualitative responses. Crafted report results and summary. Answered the study questions with the findings.
May 2017	Doctoral defense.
May 2017	Potentially Publish findings.
onward	Destroy Qualtrics data records. Destroy all data collected and charts used for data coding.

The methodology chapter describes in detail the approach to the study using a retrospective mixed method layered with phenomenology with reference to the research design approaches (Creswell, 2003, 2013; Fowler. 2014; & Dillman et al, 2014). Each data set was described. The survey instrument was explained and the intended data analysis methods were presented. The chapter concluded with the timeline used in the study. Based on this design, the data findings will be presented and described in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, the research findings from three qualitative and quantitative data sources: the survey data, the document data, and the funding data are provided. The research findings fall into four major categories: demographic data, early access successes, policy and understanding, and leadership knowledge. Presented in detail are the major findings in relation to the two research questions: (a) What are the most important aspects of early access processes according to those implementing early access? and (b) What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful early access process in Colorado?

Demographic Findings

The population studied included the 31 AUs with approved early access addenda filed with the CDE prior to June 2016. As a group, the sample represented AUs in six regions of Colorado. Their districts ranged in size from less than 500 students to greater than 25,000 students. The largest group of survey respondents represented AUs with more than 5,000 students. Table two presents the potential and actual survey respondents from the six regions in Colorado, the population, included in this study.

Table 2
Regional Data: Administrative Unit/School District/Addendum Information

Region	Number of AUs in Each Region	Number of Districts in Each Region	Documents Filed with CDE Read & Coded (*n*)	Percent by Region (%)
East Central	1	20	0	0.00
Metro	16	18	12	36.0
North Central	10	20	3	75.0
Northeast	3	14	0	0.00
Northwest	7	19	4	57.1
Pikes Peak	10	20	6	60.0
Southeast	3	19	2	66.7
South Central	3	14	0	0.00
Southwest-East	1	14	1	100.0
Southwest-West	1	9	0	0.00
West Central	5	12	3	60.0
Total Surveys Sent			31	

Note. An administrative unit (AU) may be one district or many districts operating fiscally as one unit. CDE = Colorado Department of Education. Column four indicates the number of AUs in that region that have an addendum in place to evaluate young gifted learners. Percentage in Column five reflects amount of early access processes in place.

Thirty-one surveys were sent out and 21 returned, equaling a response rate of 67.7%. Fowler (2014) stated that "there is no agreed upon standard for a minimum acceptable response rate" (p. 43). Fowler (2014) further stated that government contracted surveys need a response rate of greater than 80%. Academic surveys, using in-person interviews, generally achieve a 70% response rate when adults are responding (Fowler, 2014). This study used an electronic survey and not all respondents answered every question.

The CDE divides the state into 11 separate geographic regions: East Central, Metro, North Central, Northeast, Northwest, Pikes Peak, Southeast, South Central, Southwest-East, Southwest-West, and West Central. The fact that the researcher is a teaching professional in the Pikes Peak region could have attributed to the surge of

responses from that specific region. The survey respondents were asked to indicate the region of Colorado where their individual AU was located. In Table 2, the (*n*) indicates the number returned by each region. The percentile response per region was calculated as (*n*/*P* = %). seven of the 11 regions of Colorado are represented in the data. One school district did not indicate their region. Four regions have no representation in the survey results and were not considered in the sample. The East Central, Northeast, South Central, and Southwest-West regions of Colorado are not represented in this sample (*S*). None of the AUs in these three Colorado regions had an early access addendum filed with the CDE. The survey responses include 58% representation from the Denver Metro and Pikes Peak regions (see Table 2).

District demographic findings from the survey instrument are reported in Table 3. Participants were asked to provide the size of their district or AU. This was collected to understand the size of the districts and AUs that were engaged in an early access process and which AUs took time to respond to the survey. Twenty districts provided a size descriptor that most closely matched their student population. Representation in all six size descriptors was shared. One district responded that has between 500 and 1,000 students enrolled. Three AUs represented in the sample have between 1,000 and 5,000 students enrolled. Six districts indicated that they had 5,000 or fewer students, representing 30% of the sample (*S*). The largest percentage of districts responding to the survey represented AUs with student enrollments of more than 5,000 students. This data indicates that greater that 70% of the sample data came from nonrural AUs with more than 5,000 students enrolled. Eleven AUs (55%) indicated they had more than 10,000 students enrolled, indicating that larger districts had a stronger voice in this sample.

Table 3
Administration Unit Size Distribution

Size Descriptors	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percent (%)
Less than 500 students	2	10
500 to 1,000 students	1	05
1,000 to 5,000 students	3	15
5,000 to 10,000 students	3	15
10,000 to 25,000 students	6	30
Greater than 25,000 students	5	25
Total Responses	20	100%

Note: The Colorado Department of Education defined the Administrative Unit size descriptors.

Research Question 1

Assumptions

Assumptions tests indicated violations of univariate normality in the data based on the following conventional tests: visual inspection of boxplots, Shapiro-Wilk, skewness, and kurtosis estimates (Field, 2009; Tbachnick & Fidell, 2013). Violations were consistent across tests for the following four variables: ABILITY, PD, GUIDE, and PRINC. Six univariate outliers were detected for these four variables—one for ABILITY, two for PD, two for GUIDE, and one for PRINC. Skewness estimates were outside the normal skewness range of -1 to +1 for ABILITY (1.27), PD (-1.37), GUIDE (1.77), and PRINC (-1.77). Only the PD variable had a kurtosis estimate outside the normal range of -3 to +3 of 3.70. In addition, the Shapiro-Wilk test results indicated a violation of normality with a significant result for these four variables, and a fifth variable, COORD ($p < .05$; see Table 10). This evidence clearly indicated that nonparametric statistical tests be used for data analysis. The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to test skewness and kurtosis (see Table 10).

Aspect Findings

The key listed in Table four provides the variables used in the comparative tests of the rank order question. The codes were entered into SPSS and used consistently throughout the tests run using the SPSS 24.0 software. The PD code is the aspect variable to indicate having professional development is an important aspect in the early access process. The PRINC code is the aspect variable to indicate having a principal on the early access team is an important aspect in the early access process. The PARENTLTR code is the aspect variable to indicate having a letter from the parents is an important aspect in the early access process. The PSYCH code is the aspect variable to indicate having a school psychologist on the early access team is an important aspect in the early access process. The TCHRLTR code is the aspect variable to indicate having a letter of recommendation from a current teacher is an important aspect in the early access process. The FOLOIO code is the aspect variable to indicate having a portfolio of student work is an important aspect in the early access process. The OBS code is the aspect variable to indicate having time to observe the early access candidate and using a nationally norm referenced observation tool is an important aspect in the early access process. The COORD code is the aspect variable to indicate having one AU coordinator server as part of the early access team and manage the process is an important aspect in the early access process. The ACHV code is the aspect variable to indicate having nationally norm referenced achievement test data is an important aspect in the early access process. The BOE code is the aspect variable to indicate having a body of evidence for each early access candidate is an important aspect in the early access process. The ABILITY code is the aspect variable to indicate having nationally norm referenced ability test data is an

important aspect in the early access process. The APP code is the aspect variable to indicate having a clear application in each AU is an important aspect in the early access process. Finally, the GUIDE code is the aspect variable to indicate having clear guidelines set forth by the CDE is an important aspect in the early access process.

Survey – Quantitative Results

Table 4
Aspect Variables Key

Aspect	Variable
Professional Development	PD
Principal	PRINC
Parent Letter	PARENTLTR
School Psychologist	PSYCH
Teacher Letter	TCHRLTR
Portfolio	FOLIO
Observation	OBS
District Coordinator	COORD
Student Achievement	ACHV
Body of Evidence	BOE
Student Ability	ABILITY
Application	APP
Clear CDE Guidelines	GUIDE

Table five describes the findings from rank order question: "In your opinion, which aspects of the process outlined in Colorado House Bill 1021 Early Access legislation are the most helpful in your district/AU's successful assessment and identification of early access children?" The respondents ranked their choices, where (1) is the most important aspect in the process, and (13) is the least important aspect. The Friedman test for rank ordered questions was used to determine the most important rankings statistically. It answered the survey question, "Which aspects were ranked most important for successful assessment and identification of early access children?" This was a pivotal question to the study. Kendall's W-test was used to verify to what extent

the raters agreed, and Spearman's test tested the reliability among all pairs of raters. Not all respondents ranked each item, resulting in varied sample sizes for each aspect presented. In one case, a respondent only ranked their top five choices. During analysis, it was discovered that some respondents ranked two or more items with the same number, further complicating the analysis. Table five presents the data collected from the rank order question in descending order with the most important process aspect at the top.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics

Response	Overall *n*	Mode	Modal Responses (*n*)	Modal Reponses (%)	Mean	*SD*	Skewness
Parent Letter	16	13	5	31.3	9.81	3.08	0.75
Application	17	2	4	23.5	4.24	2.82	-0.83
Teacher Letter	16	12	5	31.3	8.94	2.67	0.36
Student Ability	16	3	5	31.3	4.75	2.89	-1.27
Student Achievement	16	4	4	25.0	5.38	2.87	-0.55
Observation	16	5[a]	3	18.8	6.88	2.63	0.05
Body of Evidence	17	4	4	23.5	5.00	2.81	-2.10
District Coordinator	17	1[a]	3	17.6	5.41	4.12	-0.64
Professional Development	16	11	5	31.3	10.50	2.66	1.38
School Psychologist	17	7[a]	3	17.6	8.49	2.54	-0.36
Principal	16	12	4	25.0	10.13	2.83	1.77
Portfolio	16	7	3	18.8	7.88	3.12	-0.25
Clear CDE Guidelines	17	1	8	47.1	2.47	2.12	-1.77

Note. CDE = Colorado Department of Education. Sample size differences due to missing data. [a] multiple modes; lowest (most important) value reported.

According to the survey data, the most important aspect of a successful early access process was having clear guidelines (GUIDE) from the CDE. Of the 17 respondents who ranked this item, 47.1% ranked it as their most important aspect. Having a clear application process (APP) available in each school district or AU was ranked as the second most important aspect of a successful process. Of the 17 respondents or 23.5% indicated that the application was second in importance. The third item of importance was the inclusion of nationally norm referenced ability measures (ABILITY). Sixteen survey respondents or 31.3% ranked ability measures as third in importance. Using a body of evidence (BOE) to evaluate a student and including nationally norm referenced achievement measures (ACHV) were both ranked fourth in importance. Going beyond the fifth level of ranking in the data analysis became increasingly more difficult as skewness became increasingly evident (see Table 5).

In examining the modal percentage responses, the frequency of times any one aspect was selected in the ranking, it became clear that the CDE guidelines remained the aspect of greatest importance, followed by student ability measures, teacher letters, parent letters, and professional development. Another look at the mode where the value (1) was selected most indicated that clear CDE guidelines and a district coordinator were both ranked first in importance most frequently.

Though the 1–13 ranking of the process attributes was not achieved, some valid data was retrieved that helped nullify the hypothesis that there were no positive early access processes in Colorado. It was not a clear list in descending order due to mode duplication on the part of the survey respondents. This was an unforeseen data entry error on the part of the respondents and created the need for further analysis. Table six more clearly represents the top four ranked items that respondents indicated need to be included in any successful early access process according to this research sampling.

Table 6

Most Important Aspects for Successful Assessment and Identification of Early Access Children by Respondent Rank Order

Rank	Aspect	Responses	
		n	%
Rank 1	Clear CDE Guidelines	7	43.8
	District Coordinator	3	18.8
	Body of Evidence	2	12.5
	Application	2	12.5
	Student Ability	1	6.3
	Student Achievement	1	6.3
	TOTAL	16	100.0
Rank 2	Application	4	23.5
	District	3	17.6
	Clear CDE	3	17.6
	Student	2	11.8
	Body of	2	11.8
	Student Ability	1	5.9
	Observation	1	5.9
	Principal	1	5.9
	TOTAL	17	100.0
Rank 3	Student Ability	5	29.4
	Application	3	17.6
	Clear CDE	3	17.6
	District	2	11.8
	Parent Letter	1	5.9
	Observation	1	5.9
	Body of	1	5.9
	Portfolio	1	5.9
	TOTAL	17	100.0
Rank 4	Student Achievement	4	23.5
	Body of Evidence	4	23.5
	Student Ability	3	17.6
	Application	2	11.8
	Teacher Letter	1	5.9
	Professional	1	5.9
	Portfolio	1	5.9
	Clear CDE Guidelines	1	5.9
	TOTAL	17	100.0

Note. All data were self-reported. CDE = Colorado Department of Education.

Table seven presents another view of the top four aspects of the early access process. By separating these four from the remaining nine aspects, a 20.3% difference

between clear CDE guidelines (GUIDE) and clear AU application (APP) information is shown. Table eight provides the same data using the mode as the sorting unit, with Mode 1 as the most important aspect at the top of the table and Mode 13 as the least important aspect at the bottom of the table. As stated, the modal responses and the amount of skewness affected the rank order outcomes. Sample size (*n*) differs item by item and affected the overall data analysis.

Table 7
Most Important Aspects Overall

Aspect	Overall Ranking	Responses Within Rank	
		n	%
CDE Guidelines	1	7	43.8
Clear Application	2	4	23.5
Ability Measures	3	5	29.4
Achievement Measures	4	4	23.5

Note. Responses within rank indicate estimates specific to each unique respondent rank.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics II

Response	Overall *n*	Mode	Modal Responses (*n*)	Modal Reponses (%)	Mean	*SD*	Skewness
Clear CDE Guidelines	17	1	8	47.1	2.47	2.12	-1.77
Application	17	2	4	23.5	4.24	2.82	-0.83
Student Ability	16	3	5	31.3	4.75	2.89	-1.27
Body of Evidence	17	4	4	23.5	5.00	2.81	-2.10
Student Achievement	16	4	4	25.0	5.38	2.87	-0.55
District Coordinator	17	1[a]	3	17.6	5.41	4.12	-0.64
Observation	16	5[a]	3	18.8	6.88	2.63	0.05
Portfolio	16	7	3	18.8	7.88	3.12	-0.25
Teacher Letter	16	12	5	31.3	8.94	2.67	0.36
School Psychologist	17	7[a]	3	17.6	8.49	2.54	-0.36
Parent Letter	16	13	5	31.3	9.81	3.08	0.75
Principal	16	12	4	25.0	10.13	2.83	1.77
Professional Development	16	11	5	31.3	10.50	2.66	1.38

Note. CDE = Colorado Department of Education. Sample size differences due to missing data. [a] multiple modes; lowest (most important) value reported.

Rather than repeated measures ANOVA, the Friedman test was used to assess whether the aspect variables had identical means due to normality assumption violations. Table nine provides the results of the Friedman test. The Friedman test was recommended for nonnormal ordinal level data; however, ties may be problematic (Friedman, 1940; Siegel & Castellan, 1988). Additionally, observed were numerous clustered responses in the data, therefore, a follow-up Kendall's W analysis was also conducted (Howell, 2002; Siegel & Castellan, 1988; Song et al., 2014).

Friedman Test. The hypothesis "H_1: The population distributions of the 13 rating variables were identical" was tested to answer the research question, "Which aspects were ranked most important for successful assessment and identification of early access children?"

H_1: The population distribution of the 13 rating variables were identical.

Friedman's Q results indicated that the respondents rated the aspect variables differently ($\chi^2(12) = 84.54$, $p < 0.001$). Mean ranks ranged from 2.4–10.5 with lower means indicating most importance. This indicated that clear CDE guidelines ($M = 2.4$) was rated the most important aspect, followed by a clear application provided by the district or AU ($M = 4.38$), student ability as measured on a nationally norm referenced ability measure ($M = 4.75$), using a body of evidence ($M = 5.06$), and student achievement as measured on a nationally norm referenced achievement measure ($M = 8.94$). Clear CDE guidelines ($M = 2.4$) was rated least important. This was in accordance with the literature and retrospective data analysis (Friedman, 1940).

Table 9
Friedman Mean Rank Results for Aspect Variables

Rank	Aspect Variable	Mean Rank
1	Clear CDE Guidelines	2.44
2	Application	4.38
3	Student Ability	4.75
4	Body of Evidence	5.06
5	Student Achievement	5.38
6	District Coordinator	5.69
7	Observation	6.88
8	Portfolio	7.88
9	Teacher Letter	8.94
10	School Psychologist	9.19
11	Parent Letter	9.81
12	Principal	10.13
13	Professional Development	10.50

Note. Ranking scale range was 1 – Most Important to 13 – Least Important.

Reliability of Scores

Kendall's Concordance Coefficient W Test. In order to assure the accuracy and precision of analysis results, A Kendall's W test was conducted to assess agreement among raters (Howell, 2002; Kendall, 1938; Siegel & Castellan, 1988; Song et al., 2014). The hypothesis "H_2: The participants' ratings are independent (do not agree at all)" was

tested to answer the research question, “To what extent do all 16 respondents agree on their rankings of the most important aspects for successful assessment and identification of early access children?”

The results revealed an adequate to low Kendall coefficient for the extent to which all respondent rankings agreed, which indicated the raters were applying somewhat similar criteria in their assessments ($W = .44$). According to Fowler (2014), “the question should all mean the same thing to all respondents. If two respondents understand the question to mean different things, their answers may be different for that reason alone” (p. 79).

Spearman Correlation. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients analyses were computed to evaluate reliability between all pairs of raters using data with nonnormal distribution (Howell, 2002; Kendall, 1938; Song et al., 2014; Spearman, 1904). It was calculated from Kendall’s W using the formula below. This estimate represents the average over all possible Spearman correlations among all raters (Howell, 2002). Using the criteria of highly correlated ($r_s > 0.7$), moderately correlated ($0.4 \leq r_s < 0.7$), slightly correlated ($0 \leq r_s < 0.4$) and negatively correlated ($r_s < 0$), results revealed a moderate to low correlation between pairs of variables ($r_s = .4$; Howell, 2002; Siegel & Castellan, 1988; Song et al., 2014; Spearman, 1904). This indicated agreement between individual pairs of raters was somewhat variable. This notable disagreement could be attributed to divergent opinions and understandings of early access for gifted young learners and the ethnic, racial, and regional diversity of the sample. The fact that respondents varied in their years of experience and endorsement status as teachers of the gifted and talented could have also caused interpretation variance.

Average Spearman Correlation over Judges formula: $\bar{r}_s = \frac{kW-1}{k-1}$, where $\bar{r}_s$ represents the average Spearman correlation, *k* denotes the number of judges, and *W* denotes the Kendall's W estimate.

Table 10
Normality and Descriptive Statistics for Aspects Variables

Aspect	*n*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk		
								Statistic	*df*	*p*
Parent Letter	16	3	13	9.81	3.08	-0.75	-0.04	0.90	16	0.08
Application	17	1	10	4.24	2.82	0.83	-0.46	0.91	16	0.11
Teacher Letter	16	4	12	8.94	2.67	-0.36	-0.91	0.90	16	0.08
Student Ability	16	1	12	4.75	2.89	1.27	1.35	0.87	16	0.03
Student Achievement	16	1	11	5.38	2.87	0.55	-0.31	0.94	16	0.33
Observation	16	2	11	6.88	2.63	-0.05	-0.52	0.96	16	0.71
Body of Evidence	17	1	10	5.00	2.81	0.21	-1.06	0.95	16	0.44
District Coordinator	17	1	13	5.41	4.12	0.64	-1.01	0.89	16	0.07
Professional Development	16	4	13	10.50	2.66	-1.37	1.30	0.82	16	0.01
School Psychologist	17	5	13	8.94	2.54	0.33	-0.86	0.91	16	0.13
Principal	16	2	13	10.13	2.83	-1.77	3.70	0.82	16	0.01
Portfolio	16	3	13	7.88	3.12	0.25	-1.16	0.94	16	0.34
Clear CDE Guidelines	17	1	8	2.47	2.12	1.77	2.59	0.71	16	0.00

Note. Criteria for normality = -1 ≤ skewness ≤ + 1; -3 ≤ kurtosis ≤ + 3; Shapiro-Wilk $p > .05$. Sample size differences due to missing data.

Boxplots were examined for visual inspection and detection of outliers on variables with skewness violation. It was evident outliers influenced skewness estimates on the variables ability measures (ABILITY), using a body of evidence (BOE), professional development (PD), having a principal on the Early Access team (PRINC),

and having clear guidelines provided by the Colorado Department of Education (GUIDE). The boxplots presented below depict these five variables (see Figures 2–6).

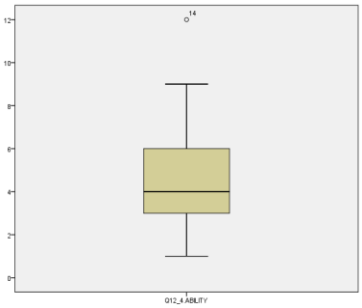

Figure 2. Ability boxplot.

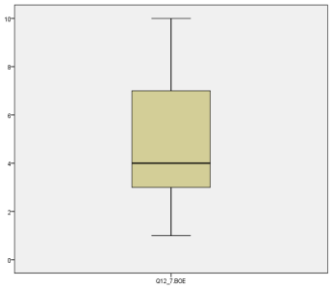

Figure 3. Body of evidence boxplot.

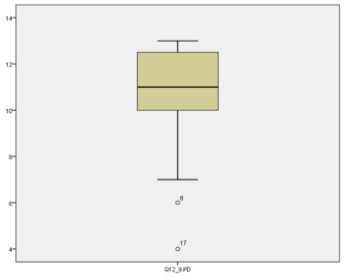

Figure 4. Professional development boxplot.

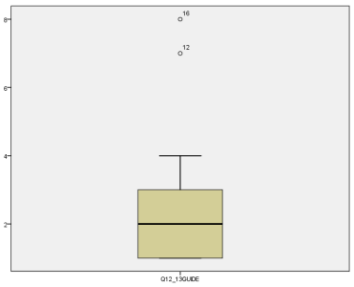

Figure 5. Principal boxplot.

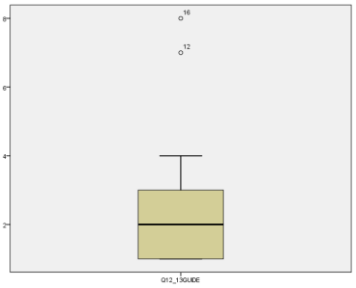

Figure 6. Clear CDE guidelines boxplot.

Survey – Qualitative Results

To support the findings of the quantitative rank order question and to allow survey respondents to add additional success aspects from their early access processes, an open-ended question was posed and analyzed for themes: “In addition to the checklist above, what are the factors that make your district/AU’s process successful? These may be steps or processes you put in place beyond what is specified in the legislation. Please share some highlights of your success regarding Early Access.” The intent of this open-ended question was to allow each respondent to share additional aspects of their process, which they thought added to their success beyond the rank order list provided in the previous question. Twelve respondents added text to this open-ended question. Using axial coding, the themes that emerged indicated the importance of an early access team,

clear consistent communication, and a clearly articulated application and assessment process.

Though not all respondents agreed on the precise make-up of the team, the overarching indications were to include a cross-departmental representation on the early access team. Suggestions for team inclusion were: a team leader trained in gifted education, an early childhood expert, a preschool teacher or kindergarten teacher, a school psychologist, an elementary principal, and a teacher of the gifted. The need to have credible, educated, and experienced review team members was essential to each of the respondents.

The need for clear and consistent communication was repeatedly mentioned in the responses. Communication was recommended to include communication between and among all early access team members and within AUs. Another need was communication with the community in the form of parent information meetings, printed information, and web-based communication items about early access. Clear and specific communication with parents working with school personnel in the evaluation process on behalf of their child was also noted in multiple responses.

One communication struggle clearly emerged in the data when communication was linked to sharing assessment results with parents. When a child was not continued in an early access process or the early access team determined the child should not be admitted to school under the early access provisions, having those difficult communications was repeatedly mentioned. A second area of difficult conversation arose related to the confusion on the part of parents and some school employees that the early access program was a way to avoid the Colorado age law for kindergarten and first grade.

The need for a clear and consistent process for applications and screening also emerged frequently in the responses. One response strongly suggested the community needed to have all aspects of the application available online with the option to submit the application materials electronically. Others insisted on a clear process and an application that was understandable and easy to complete and submit. The need to communicate with and educate public and private preschool educators fell into the both the clear application and communication categories.

Research Question 1 Conclusion

The data provided in response to the rank order question and the open-ended follow-up question on positive aspects coalesced to answer the research question: "What are the most important positive aspects of the early access process?" The survey data indicated that the most successful aspects of an early access process included clear and specific guidelines from the CDE. Aspects of importance also included clear and specific application information shared from the individual school districts and AUs to stakeholders. Including a body of evidence to evaluate early access candidates that included nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures were essential. The qualitative findings indicated that communication and working as a team were the most essential aspects of an early access process. The qualitative data also emphasized the need for a strong body of evidence that included ability and achievement data as well as readiness measurements. Survey respondents were willing to share their successes. In the words of one respondent, "It is of utmost importance, for future administrative leaders considering early access legislation, that they need to have methods to clearly communicate with all stakeholders and gather a knowledgeable team committed to working with gifted young learners."

Research Question 2

In order to answer the second research question: "What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful early access process in Colorado?" the following sections present findings concerning the areas of policy and knowledge, and understanding and leadership. The individual successful aspects of the early access

process cannot stand alone. Administrative unit leadership must know how to use the specific aspect findings in a larger context that encompasses a process.

Policy and Knowledge Findings

Table 11 indicates the endorsement status of the survey respondents. By self-reporting, 70% of the survey respondents indicated they had met the requirements of the Colorado K–12 gifted endorsement. The remaining 30% indicated they did not have CDE K–12 gifted endorsement. This indicates 30% of the respondents responsible for gifted education in their respective AUs were not gifted endorsed.

Table 11
Endorsement Data

	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percent (%)
Holds K–12 Endorsement	14	70
No Endorsement	6	30
Total	20	100

Note. All responses were self-reported.

The Likert-scale style question, "Please rate your level of understanding about the early access process," allowed the respondents to self-evaluate. Some guidelines were provided for the descriptive values presented, but the choice was still at the discretion of the respondents. Fifteen of the 19 respondents (78.9%) indicated they possessed very good or excellent knowledge about early access as a form of whole-grade acceleration for gifted young learners seeking entrance into kindergarten and first grade ahead of age peers. Table 12 describes the percentage of respondents with early access knowledge as measured on a self-rating scale where one = poor understanding of early access and five = indicated excellent understanding of early access. Though 45% of respondents

indicated they had been in the gifted lead role for three years or less, these same respondents indicated they had a very good or excellent understanding of early access. It was not asked in this survey but it may be of interest in future study to know where the participants gained this knowledge and training. The mean for level of understanding about early access was 4.21 with a standard deviation of 1.00.

Table 12
Levels of Understanding About Early Access

Self-Rating Descriptors	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percent (%)
Poor Understanding of Early Access	0	0
Fair Understanding of Early Access	2	11
Good Understanding of Early Access	2	11
Very good Understanding of Early Access	5	26
Excellent Understanding of Early Access	10	52
Total	19	100.00

Note. All responses were self-reported.

The next question asked: "In your opinion, how important is early access?" The response choices were provided in a Likert-style question, where one = Extremely Important, two = Very Important, three = Moderately Important, four = Slightly Important, and five = Not at All Important. Seventeen respondents provided data for this variable (see Table 13). Fifty-three percent of respondents selected Extremely Important, 35% selected Very Important, and 12% selected Moderately Important. This shows the variance within respondents' views. The mean was 1.59 and the standard deviation was 0.69. No respondents indicated that early access was Slightly Important or Not at All Important.

Table 13
Early Access Importance

Level of Importance	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percent (%)
Extremely Important	9	53
Very Important	6	35
Moderately Important	2	12
Slightly Important	0	0.0
Not at All Important	0	0.0
Total	17	100.00

Note. All responses were self-reported.

To understand the commitment by school districts and AUs to acceleration and early access as a form of whole-grade acceleration, the following two yes/no questions were posed: "Does the school district you represent have a policy for whole-grade acceleration?" and "Does the school district you represent have a policy for early Access?" Figures seven and eight show the AUs commitment to acceleration and early access by having policy in place. Nineteen survey respondents provided data for the acceleration policy question. Figure seven indicates 94.5% of AUs have policy in place concerning acceleration. One AU (5.5%) did not have policy regarding acceleration. Figure eight indicates 19 survey respondents provided data for the early access policy question. It shows that 94.5% of AUs have policy in place concerned with early access admissions. One AU (5.5%) did not have policy regarding early access admission.

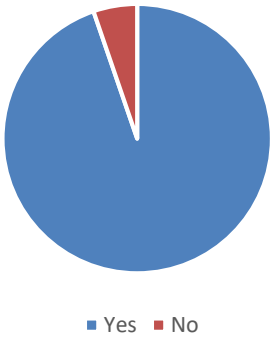

Figure 7. Acceleration policy.

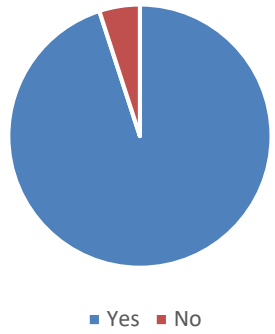

Figure 8. Early access policy.

Leadership Findings

Table 14 provides the self-reported data from the respondents when asked: "Are you the district level administrator responsible for gifted education reporting?" The responses indicated that 85% of respondents were responsible for gifted education programming and budgets. Another 15% indicated they were not the gifted lead. There was no option to name another role for this question. The data were collected from a simple yes/no closed choice question.

Table 14
Gifted Lead for the Administrative Unit

Response	Number of Responses	Percent Lead (%)
AU Lead (Yes)	17	85
Not AU Lead (No)	3	15
Total	20	100%

Note. All responses were self-reported. CDE Defines the gifted lead as the Administrative Unit person responsible for gifted budgets and reports.

As a follow-up leadership question, respondents were asked: "For how many years have you been responsible for gifted programming in your current district? The longevity of the respondents in their current position was collected using a forced choice

question. Table 15 provides the self-reported data corresponding to their years of experience in the current district in the role of gifted lead. A surprising outcome of the survey came when looking at this longevity data. Two respondents indicated they were not the gifted lead. One respondent indicated the 2016–2017 school year was their inaugural year in this role. Forty percent indicated they had been in their current leadership position for three years or less. A full 60% of respondents had been in their lead positions for six years or less. Forty percent of the respondents had been in their role for greater than seven years. The mean number of years in the lead role was 3.10. Even though 60% of the respondents were in the lead roles for less than six years, and 30% did not hold Colorado gifted endorsement, when asked to rank their level of understanding about early access all respondents indicated they had fair to excellent knowledge as previously demonstrated. Additionally, the bulk of the early access addenda filed with the CDE were submitted prior to the start of the 2011–2012 school year (CDE, 2016). When looking retrospectively at the length of tenure provided by the survey respondents, 90% of the current gifted leads inherited an early access process they did not create.

Table 15
Longevity in the Gifted Lead Role

Service Years at Gifted Lead Descriptors	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percent (%)
This is My First Year	1	5
1–3 Years	8	40
4–6 Years	3	15
7–10 Years	4	20
Greater than 10 Years	4	20
Total Responses (*N*)	20	100%

Note. All responses were self-reported.

The funding data and information extracted from the addenda further answer the second research question and are presented in the following section. Here, future administrative leadership can see in a linear glance what details they need to consider when planning to adopt early access legislation. Of the 31 addenda submitted, two addenda were not considered for text review. One early access addendum from a single school district was used for quantitative data only. No narrative portions of that addendum were coded as the researcher helped craft that addendum in the school district where she is currently employed. It was omitted to avoid bias by not including that district's process and procedural ideas. One addendum from a Bureau of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) representing several individual school districts was not considered as it was simply a policy statement and did not contain the specific process and procedural details required by HB-08-1021 to be considered an early access addendum. With the elimination of the two aforementioned addenda, the number of early access addenda reviewed for qualitative information was reduced to 29. All addenda reviewed were given a code number, and that number was maintained throughout each of the following tables.

In order for an AU to conduct early access evaluations and admit gifted young learners who meet the state criteria as set forth in HB 08-1021, the AU has to submit a comprehensive plan in the form of an application called the Early Access Addendum (CDE, 2016; C.S.L. 22-20-204[2]). Each AU must describe what evaluative measures they will use to assess children, the fees they will charge, the date range when they will consider students per calendar year, and how they will communicate with families about the process. In some cases, samples are included.

The majority of the early access addenda were submitted to the CDE between September 2008 and December 2009. Twenty addenda were submitted during an initial 16-month period. These first 20 districts are considered "early adopters" according to the DOI framework (Rogers, 2003). The remaining nine addenda were submitted between June 2010 and August 2013, with a few trickling in over the next 18 months until the last addendum was submitted in August 2013. No early access addenda have been submitted to the CDE since August 2013, though there is an annual opportunity for AUs to submit new or revised addenda. Table 16 provides the findings from the addenda review regarding submission dates.

The Colorado early access legislation was established in 2008. It is now 2017. The document review revealed when each district submitted their initial addendum to the CDE. Research into available state information indicated 31 Colorado AUs had an early access addendum filed with CDE (CDE, 2016). Figure nine indicates the diffusion of early access over time. The solid line represents the first 31 AUs with an addendum on file. The red dotted line indicates the remaining Colorado AUs that would need to adopt an early access process in order to reach the full 100% innovation among all Colorado AUs (Rogers, 2003).

Table 16
Districts/Application Submission Date/Submitter Information

District Number	Addendum Submission Date	AU Lead Still in that Role (Yes/No)
1	12/08	Yes
2	12/09	No
3	01/09	No
4	01/09	No
5	09/08	No
6	09/08	No
7	09/08	No
8	undated	No
9	09/08	Yes
10	08/13	No
11	06/10	No
12	01/09	No
13	02/09	No
14	12/09	No
15	12/11	No
16	12/10	No
17	12/09	No
18	01/09	No
19	08/11	No
20	09/08	No
21	04/12	No
22	12/08	No
23	01/09	No
24	12/08	No
25	09/08	No
26	01/11	No
27	12/08	No
28	04/12	No
29	04/11	Yes
30	01/09	No
31	04/09	No

Note. 3/31 = .0967% of the original early access addendum authors remain in their district as leads for gifted programs. It is very hard to gather a central tendency from this small percentage of contributors who were part of the original early access addendum development. AU is the abbreviation for Administrative Unit which can be a single school district or multiple school districts working cooperatively as one fiscal body.

Diffusion of Innovation and Colorado

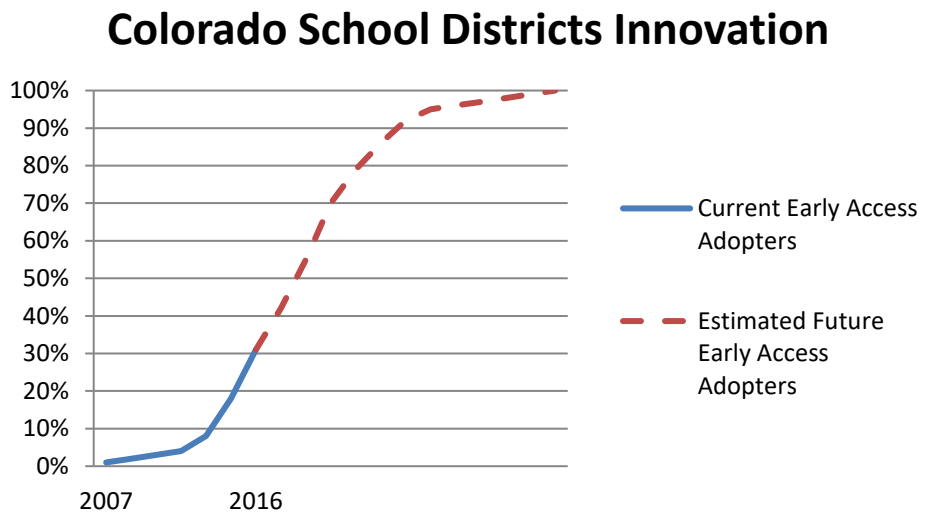

Figure 9. Current Colorado administrative units with an early access addendum based on the Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003) S curve.

Through this study of Colorado adoption of early access shows how closely the phases of diffusion in Colorado's adoption of HB 08-1021 follows Roger's (2003) DOI model. According to Rogers (2003), "innovators" are those who embrace an idea or approach right away. Innovators represent the first 2.5% of those in a system to adopt an innovation; "early adopters" are the next 13.5%; and the "early majority" are those who adopt a new concept and represent 24% of the concept diffusion (Rogers, 2003). These three groups together represent 49.5% or the midpoint of a total concept adoption. Colorado has 31 Administrative Units with an early access plan in place. These 31 Administrative Units represent 75 individual school districts of the total 179 school districts in Colorado. This is a 41% adoption or diffusion of the innovation of early access. According to Rogers (2003) that indicates Colorado has completed the innovator

phase of 2.5%, the early adopter phase which represents the next 13.5%, but has not completed the Early Majority phase of innovation which is the next 34% (p. 281.) As the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, (Rogers, 2003) is based on observation, it is purely descriptive. There is no assurance that Early Access in Colorado will reach 100% diffusion. Innovations can be accepted by organization or rejected. (Rogers, 2003, p. 417). In the case of Early Access in Colorado, the legislation remains optional, and AUs can decide to accept the process or reject it.

Admission Criteria and Process Elements Extracted for the Addenda

The important aspects of the early access processes fell into two groups, criteria and process elements. Both were extracted from the text of the EA addenda on file with CDE. The admission criteria described in Table 17 included the specific measurements and the acceptable criteria each AU used when assessing their EA candidates. The elements described in Table 17 correlate with the most important aspects of the EA process as indicated in the quantitative findings shown in Tables 8 and Table 9. These elements included national norm referenced ability measures and nationally norm referenced achievement measures as part of a BOE.

Table 17 provides the measurement tools by AU. Column 1 indicates the code assigned to each AU. Columns two and three provide an overview of the ability measure and their corresponding acceptable minimum score ranges. While there were many similarities in the tools used for ability assessment, the acceptable percentage rates and IQ scores varied. IQ scores indicated acceptance of a minimum score as low as 130 and as high as 145. This represents one full standard deviation difference. The CDE (2016)

guidelines indicate an early access candidate must achieve 97% as measured on an age-appropriate ability measure. Some AUs posted a minimum IQ score in place of or in addition to the stated percentile score.

The achievement measures and their corresponding acceptable minimum score ranges are found in columns four and five. The achievement measures were similar among the AUs. A discrepancy is evident in the acceptable minimum achievement scores. Acceptable achievement scores as low as the 90th percentile was noted in Column five. The AUs indicated they intended to use the Test of Early Reading (TERA) and Test of Early Math (TEMA). Others noted tools such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Woodcock Johnson (WJ-III). One district noted that they wanted candidates to be, "one year ahead" but did not indicate how they would measure and know what 1-year ahead looked like. The widest window of acceptable scores was seen in the achievement area. A score as low as the 90% and as high as the 99% was specified. Many districts simply did not have achievement scores posted. The CDE (2016) guidelines indicate an early access candidate must achieve 97% as measured on an age-appropriate achievement measure.

The qualitative assessment indicators including the readiness measures are listed in Columns eight and nine. In addition to parent checklists and the Kingore Observation Inventory (KOI), a variety of kindergarten readiness checklists were noted in Column seven. Preschool and kindergarten teacher recommendations were considered as evidence for readiness as well. The readiness category considered Response to Intervention (RTI) committee recommendations, work samples, and behavior assessments. The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Assessment was specified by one school district and the use of the

IAS was noted as a guide when considering early access children (Assouline et al., 2009). Not all measures included in the addendum met the CDE (2016) requirements.

As additional pieces to a collecting a BOE, was the use of portfolios, listed in column seven. Eleven AUs indicated that they used some form of portfolio as part of the BOE. Some indicated that the portfolios were the first look at the candidate's demonstrated ability and were used as a way to exit the child from the process. Other districts indicated that they looked at the portfolio after ability and achievement assessments or at the end of the process, as part of the total BOE. Others indicated that they looked at the submitted portfolios with the parents so they could share more than a photograph or document might suggest. One addendum indicated that the AU would use a trial placement as a way to measure the child's readiness. Portfolios were requested as a way to gather a sense of a child's knowledge of number sense, word recognition, and writing ability.

Table 17

Early Access Criteria Extracted from Addendum, District Codes 1–31

District Code	Ability Measures	Ability Score	Achievement Measure	Achievement Score	Readiness Measures	Portfolios
1	WIPPSI, KABC	98% and above	TERA, TEMA	98% and above	KOI Portfolio, Parent and caregivers behavior rating scales	Considered as initial screener
2	KABC, DAS, UNIT	97% and above	PALs, Everyday Math		Parent supplied information, Preschool teacher input	Considered on a rolling basis as submitted
3	Stanford Binet-5, DAS, WISC, Administered by district psychologist		Kindergarten Readiness Test, TEMA, DRA		Parent and preschool inventory	
4	Kbit-2, KABC, UNIT	98% and above	WJ III, TEMA, TERA	95% and above	SKAT Standards Based Kindergarten Screening Checklist	Screen by April 1
5	Kbit-2	98% and above	TEMA, TERA	95% and above	Preschool milestones, GRS, Parent and caregivers behavior rating scale	
6	WPPSI	97% and above	Curriculum based assessments: Vocabulary, oral language, written expression, phonemic awareness, DRA-2		Vineland Adaptive and Behaviors Assessment	
7	CogAT		Portfolio and Brigance		Recommendation of the parent, preschool teachers, and RTI coordinators	
8	DAS-II, WPPSI-III		DRA-2, Fine and gross motor screening		Motor screening, small group play including transitioning from one activity to the next	
9	–	–	–	–	–	–
10	DAS II, KABC-2, Outside testing may be submitted	98% and above	IOWA 5R or 6 Complete, TOMAGS, QRI	98% and above	Getting Ready for Kindergarten checklist GRS-P	Portfolios are used along with the KOI checklist, work samples

District Code	Ability Measures	Ability Score	Achievement Measure	Achievement Score	Readiness Measures	Portfolios
11					Letter from preschool teacher	BOE to determine if the child is in top 2% of age peers, socially and academically ready for school
12	Outside testing	135 IQ and above		90% and above		Trial placements
13	WPPSI, Stanford Binet, or DAS	95% and above or a 130 IQ	One year ahead of age peers	90% and above	KOI for parents, Child Development Inventory completed by a preschool teacher, Letter of recommendation	
14		97% and above	TEMA, TERA, TEWL	97% and above	Examples of number sense, beginning sounds, shapes, color	Portfolio review rubric included
15	WPPSI or DAS by school psychologist	97% and above	TEMA, TERA	95% and above	Parent checklist, Preschool teacher's checklist, GRS	First step in elimination process
16	WPPSI, DAS	98% and above	TEMA, TERA	98% and above	Work samples, KOI, School based reading assessments, Performance examples, Product examples	"Data from outside testing may submitted but must be no more than three months from test date."
17	DAS-II, WJ III, WPPSI	98% and above	TEMA, TERA	98% and above	GRS Preschool rating scales, IAS used	Based on KOI observation checklist
18	CogAT, WPPSI, DAS	97% and above	WJ III, TEMA, TERA, TEWL, YCAT	97% and above		
19	WPPSI-3 or COGAT 6 Complete, must be administered by a district psychologist	145 IQ and above			Work samples, KOI parent checklist	
20	KABC	98% and above	DIBELS		District kindergarten readiness checklist	Examples of number sense, alphabet sounds, shapes, colors, writing, drawing
21	–	–	–	–	–	–

District Code	Ability Measures	Ability Score	Achievement Measure	Achievement Score	Readiness Measures	Portfolios
22	KABC, WPPSI	97% and above	TEMA, TERA	97% and above	Evidence of a child's performance in academic areas	
23	WIPPSI-III and outside testing	98% and above	TEMA, TERA, Interactive play observations	98% and above	Checklist of "My Child's Strengths"	KOI portfolio design
24	WIPPSI, IAS	98% and above, 140 IQ	TERA, TEMA	98% and above		
25	WPPSI, RIAS, K-Bit, Stanford Binet-V	97% and above	TEMA, TERA, Aims Web	97% and above		Submitted by parents with district support
26	Outside data is accepted	97% and above		97% and above		
27	KABC administered by a regional psychologist, outside testing accepted	97% and above	TEMA, TERA	97% and above	Examples of number sense, beginning sounds, shapes, colors	
28	DAS, WPPSI	98% and above	TEMA, TERA	98% and above	GRS- preschool by preschool teacher and parents	
29	Kbit-2	97% and above	TERA, TEMA	97% and above		Drawings, Writing and math samples
30	WPPSI administered by the district psychologist	98% and above, 130 IQ and above	VMI Visual Motor skills, My Child's Strengths checklist	98% and above		
31	WPPSI	97% and above	TEMA, TERA	98% and above	IAS is used with a minimum score of 60 points (Good candidate range)	

Note. – indicates no response. All items on the chart above were extracted from the addendum as written.

Table 18 provides specific details about the process elements of EA. The chart was created based on the information extracted from the EA addenda reviewed. Column one provides the AU code, while Column two lists the region of Colorado where the respondents were located. Column three lists the various ways the AUs intended to advertise the EA process in their AU. Also, listed in the communication column are those leaders responsible for the communication role.

Column three lists the various communication methods AUs planned to use to inform the community about early access. Posting information to the district or AU's website was the most common method of communication noted. A district-level person or the building principal conducted the direct family communication. The communication category had the most complete number of responses. The original addendum authors appeared to understand that in order to have a new program reach the community, "there had to be significant effort put forth to communicate its existence to potential consumers" (Rogers, 2003, p. 204). Rogers, (2003) suggests that interpersonal communication is the single most important way that innovation spreads among social networks (p. 17).

It was suggested in the CDE guidelines (CDE, 2016) that each AU provide copies of their communication items, those items placed on their websites, and the application itself, as well as samples of letters sent to families informing them of the EA team decision (CDE, 2016). It was observed, that few early access addenda had any attachments. Seven of the 31 addenda reviewed contained one or more attachments. Three AUs provided only their process flowchart. Four AUs attached samples of the letters used to communicate early access decisions.

Professional learning and professional development noted in column four were additional aspects of the early access addendum that related to the process. There was limited specific information about professional development. This corresponds to the quantitative findings where professional development was ranked as the lowest in importance in Table eight.

Of interesting note, one AU indicated its intent to include front office personnel and registrars in the trainings. Preschool teachers, preschool directors, and first grade

teachers were also included in the professional development category as were local private preschool directors, indicating that the AU was willing to work with community members to find and assess bright young learners.

The application periods provided for early access assessment in column five varied widely. Some AUs accepted the CDE application timeline of January to April (CDE, 2016), while others conducted rolling admissions. Column six indicates some AUs had process start and end dates, but considered applications outside of the posted dates for new families moving into their AU or for families that moved into the area due to military orders after the early access assessment window closed. Some AUs considered early access applications after the closing dates based solely on staff availability. Finally, Column seven lists the AUs that made reference to the fact that their information was available in languages other than English. Five districts stated that they could provide early access information in Spanish as well as English. One district said they had materials in both Spanish and Russian, and one district stated that they could provide early access information in any language necessary. This indicates a cultural awareness and multicultural inclusiveness.

Other parts of the process that were included in the qualitative data extracted from the addenda, but were not ranked in the top five for importance on the quantitative data included interviews. Nine districts indicated they conducted parent and child interviews. Others indicated they conducted interviews with the parent, child, and school psychologist. In some AU addendum, they indicated that the elementary principal met with the parent and child to discuss placement options at the end of the process. One

district indicated that they dedicated a considerable block of time on one day testing the child, meeting with parents, and observing the child in a play situation.

The qualitative data consistently highlighted the need for communication. Many addenda indicated who in the AU was responsible for communicating the final decisions regarding early access admission. In several districts, the formal letter of acceptance or rejection about an early access candidate came from the team and was mailed as a hard copy through the postal service. It was indicated by several AUs that the gifted lead communicated with parents by telephone followed by a formal letter. Yet another final decision notification was communicated by the local elementary school principal directly to the candidate's parents. Table 18 includes many of the process aspects of conducting a successful Early Access process.

Table 18
Early Access Process Elements Extracted from Addendum, District Codes 1–31

District Code	Region	Communication	PD Plans	Application Period	Extended Application Period	Multiple Languages
1	Pikes Peak	TAG Director is chief communicator, Website, Handbook	Elementary admin, TAG teachers, Preschool teachers	January 1–March 30	Yes, as needed after the deadline as it is a military area	Translated as needed
2	Metro		Monthly PD	March 30–April 1	For families relocating to the area	
3	Metro			February 1–March 30	If staff is available	English and Spanish
4	Metro	District website	Principals, Preschool teachers, GT liaisons, also PD for ALP development for EA students	January 2–April 10	For families relocating to the area	Spanish
5	Metro	Website, Gifted characteristics list will be posted, Individual conversations with all parents who enquire about EA		March 1–April 30	Yes, due to rapid growth in the area	
6	Metro			January 8–April 10		
7	Metro			March–May		
8	Metro	School newsletters	Front office managers	January 1–April 1	If staff is available	Spanish
9	Metro	Brochure at each school, Website, To parents upon request			Through May 31 only. No teachers available in the summer.	–
10	North Central	GT coordinator is the main contact person. Website, Local newspapers in the spring, area preschools	GT coordinators, Liaisons, and Coaches	January 1–March 30		
11	North Central					
12	North-west	Building by building decision		January 1–May		
13	North-west	Website, GT procedure manual		January 1–April 1		

District Code	Region	Communication	PD Plans	Application Period	Extended Application Period	Multiple Languages
14	South-west	Info in all schools	Preschool teachers	February 1–15	Yes, for newly relocated families or portability situations	
15	Pikes Peak	Very clear timeline posted on the district website, Media, Newsletters		January 2–February 29		
16	North-west	Parent-friendly pamphlets, Newspaper, Posters in the community, Child find advertisements, Parents nights at elementary schools		January 1–August 31	Jan–Aug	Spanish
17	South-east	Website, Flyers, Early childhood care providers, Elementary school offices, Local newspaper	Area preschool directors, Elementary principals, GT resource teachers	February 1–June 4		
18	Metro			January 1–April 1		
19	Metro	GT webpage postings from GT coordinators in each school		January 15–April 1	No	
20	North Central	Principal meetings, Parent handbook, Internal communication system, School board meeting	Principal meetings, Internal communication system, School board meeting, Monthly GT teacher meetings	January 1–April 1	No	
21	South-west					
22	Pikes Peak	Flyers in school offices, School registrars, Learning Services coordinates with families	School registrars		Yes, for military families relocating to the area	
23	Metro	GT website, Communication will be cross-district once an EA placement is made, Press release through district publication office	Site specific	January 1–March 20	For family relocations	Spanish and Russian

District Code	Region	Communication	PD Plans	Application Period	Extended Application Period	Multiple Languages
24	Pikes Peak	Central registry, Website, Brochures, ELL coordinator	Preschool director, KOI training for all PK–5 teachers and administrators			Spanish
25	West Central	Website links, Each preschool and elementary school	New teacher trainings	February 1–April 1		
26	North Central	Individual parent calls to explain the purpose and the process				
27	Pikes Peak	Gifted handbook, Website	All GT personnel	February 17–March 20	No	
28	South-east	Website, Flyers in early childhood centers, Elementary schools, GT office, Local paper, School handbook	Elementary principals, GT leadership	January 1–February 28		
29	North Central	GT website, E-mail to private preschools, advertisements at parent meetings		January 1–April 1	Yes for relocations	
30	West Central	Newspaper, Local brochures, Post flyers, Child find, Websites		April 1–June 1		
31	Pikes Peak	GT handbook, Website, EA brochure placed in each building	Team meetings with GT staff, preschool and kindergarten teachers, building administrator	April 1–May 1	No	

Tables 17 and 18 provided a vast amount of information at a glance. Overall, no two districts approached the early access process or the arrangement of the early access addendum in the same way. The top five quantitative findings from the survey were: having clear CDE guidelines, each AU or school district having a clearly communicated application and assessment processes, including ability measures and achievement measures that are national norm referenced, and using a body of evidence. The qualitative findings indicated that building long term relationships with families of young gifted learners and meeting the needs of these young learners was crucial. Using teams of educational professionals with cross district perspectives enhanced communication with all stakeholders. Figure 10 is a depiction of the combined quantitative findings and qualitative findings analyzed from the surveys and addenda.

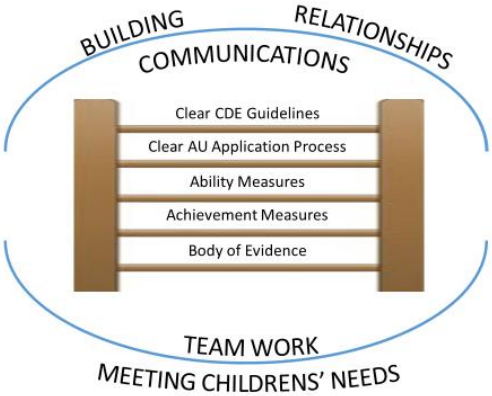

Figure 10. Quantitative and Qualitative Findings Combined.

Table 19 shows the years an AU received funding. The data were available from the CDE (2016). Table 19 maintains the same AU codes as previous tables (Column 1). Though there are 31 AUs with early access addenda on file, not all with an addendum

received funding (CDE, 2016). Nine districts never received funding according to the 2012–2016 funding data provided (CDE, 2016). Two districts received funding in one of the three years for which they were eligible. Five AUs received funding in two of the three years for which they were eligible. Fourteen AUs received funding every year of the three years' data available (CDE, 2016). Columns 3–5 show the funding data by district. Column six identifies fess for initial applications and follow-up testing. Significant differences were noted for application fees, testing fees, and in one case, the cost to a family should they want their child's testing information transferred to a different school district. Fifteen AUs posted no fees in their early access addendum. Three districts indicated early access assessment was free. Three districts indicated they charged a $25 fee for early access application and evaluation. Nine districts assessed families at a cost of $100 to more than $1,000 for the early access assessment process. Six districts indicated that though they had a set fee for the early access process, considerations would be made for families who qualified for either the free or reduced lunch program.

Table 19
Funding Results from Colorado Department of Education and Early Access Fees, District Codes 1-31

District Code	Region	EA Funding 2012–2013	EA Funding 2013–2014	EA Funding 2014–2015	Costs	Free/Reduced Lunch Fee Waive/Reduction
1	Pikes Peak	Yes	Yes	Yes	$325	Yes
2	Metro	Yes	No	No	No fee	No
3	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	$125	Yes
4	Metro	Yes	Yes	No	–	No
5	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
6	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
7	Metro	No	No	No	$25	No
8	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
9	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
10	North Central	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
11	North Central	Yes	No	Yes	$300	No
12	Northwest	No	No	No	> $1,000	No
13	Northwest	No	No	No	–	No
14	Southwest	No	No	No	–	No
15	Pikes Peak	Yes	Yes	Yes	$25	No
16	Northwest	No	No	No	No fee	No
17	Southeast	No	Yes	Yes	$280	Yes
18	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	$25	No
19	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
20	North Central	No	No	No	$100	Yes
21	Southwest	Yes	Yes	No	–	No
22	Pikes Peak	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
23	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	$250	Yes
24	Pikes Peak	No	No	No	–	No
25	West Central	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
26	North Central	Yes	Yes	Yes	–	No
27	Pikes Peak	No	No	No	–	No
28	Southeast	No	Yes	Yes	–	Yes
29	North Central	No	No	Yes	No fee	N/A
30	West Central	No	No	No	$300	No
31	Pikes Peak	No	Yes	No	$150	No

Note. – indicates no response. EA indicates Early Access.

Table 20 provides a 3-year look at the CDE funding data for kindergarten and first grade (CDE, 2016). Without compromising personal identifiable information, the following data are reported at a statewide level. In the 2012–2013 school year, 27

Colorado AUs received funding for underage students. Of the 27 districts, 53 of the students were enrolled in kindergarten and 79 were enrolled in first grade, equaling a total of 132 early access admissions. In the 2013–2014 school year, 24 Colorado AUs received funding for underage students. Of the 24 districts, 49 of the students were enrolled in kindergarten and 72 were enrolled in first grade, equaling a total of 121 early access admissions. Finally, in the 2014–2015 school year, 22 Colorado AUs received funding for underage students. Of the 22 districts, 45 of the students were enrolled in kindergarten and 70 were enrolled in first grade, equaling a total of 115 early access admissions.

Table 20
Early Access 3-Year Funding Data by Grade

Academic Years	Kindergarten Funding	First Grade Funding	Total Early Access Seats Funded Per Year
2012 - 2013	53	79	132
2013 - 2014	49	72	121
2014 - 2015	45	70	115

Note. Based on data provided by the Colorado Department of Education for 2013–2016.

Table 20 shows that kindergarten funded early access seats were highest in the 2012–2013 school year with 53 seats supported by early access legislation. The kindergarten early access seats declined to 49 in the 2013–2014 school year, and fell again in the 2014–2015 school year to 45 across the state of Colorado. According to the data, there was greater demand for early access for first grade students than kindergarten students. In the 2012–2013 school year, 79 first grade seats were funded through early access legislation. In the 2013–2014 school year, the number dropped to 72, and in 2014–2015, there was a slight decrease again to 70. Though there are slight variations in the total number of early access enrollments noted in the last three years, there was still clear indication that over 100 qualified early access students are enrolled annually in

kindergarten and first grade who meet the criteria for early access entrance to school ahead of neurotypical age peers.

Colorado House Bill 08-1021 provided very specific guidelines that submitting school districts must follow in the assessment process when considering a gifted young learner for fully subsidized early entrance to kindergarten or first grade ahead of their age peers. HB 08-1021 also allowed for local control in creating and carrying out an early access evaluation and admission process. The AUs' processes needed to include timelines and consistent communication samples. The addenda findings included clear and specific guidelines from the CDE, clearly defined application processes from each AU, and the bodies of evidence used to evaluate each candidate, which included nationally norm referenced ability measures, nationally norm referenced achievement measures, and observation checklists.

When asked to provide a compelling reason why their school district had engaged in an early access process as an "early adopter" (Rogers, 2003), the responses varied. The phrasing "compelling reason" was deliberately used to elicit the true stories that might not otherwise emerge about a specific child who was helped by early access legislation and could not be derived from the quantitative questions. None of those stories emerged in any of the 15 narrative responses.

Research Question 2 Conclusions

The data provided detailed evidence to answer the research question: "What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful early access process in Colorado?" According to the survey, the most important aspects of an Early Access process are clear guidelines from CDE, clear and consistent application processes

available in each AU, and the use of nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures. The open-ended questions indicated that in addition to the four aspects that came out of the survey, solid professional teams need to be involved with early access evaluations. The teams need to include a representative group from across the district. Further, communication was a strong outcome from the open-ended responses. Communication about early access needs to occur. Clear and open communication about early access within each AU and outside of the AU in the community is necessary. In addition, clear and consistent communication needs to be woven into the early access evaluation process, with team members, parents and teachers welcoming the young gifted learner into their class.

In order for additional AUs to engage in successful early access processes, they need to start by building an early access team of educational professionals who believe in education for the gifted and are knowledgeable about the nature and needs of gifted young learners. Having specific detailed assessment tools and readiness indicators that meet the standards set for by the CDE are also necessary. In addition, leadership need to have clearly determined communication methods to reach all stakeholders regarding the purpose of early access and a plan for ongoing sustained professional development.

Limitations of the Study

The survey portion of the data collection was designed to take less than fifteen minutes of a busy administrator's time. Not all of the open-ended questions were answered completely by all respondents. Questions were posed to elicit successful outcomes and stories, however responses voiced direct nonsupport of early access, leading to additional interpretation. Some respondents indicated they had a process in

place simply to meet the law. Others indicated that they were part of a BOCES and as the BOCES had the addendum in place before they were employed, it remains unused. Though there is no agreed-upon standard for a minimum acceptable response rate (Fowler, 2014), the 67.7% response rate indicates interest in the topic and willingness on the part of respondents to share their understanding of early access and their successes. Though the overall survey response rate is strong, not every question when considered individually has a strong response rate. This study did not have 100% input from all AUs engaged in early access processes.

Summary

Interpreting the data collected, according to Creswell (2013), requires the researcher to abstract "out beyond the codes and themes to find the larger meaning of the data" (pp. 187). The need for communication and building relationships with the families of potential early access children was clear. Using a team approach to review a child's body of evidence was as important as having a team make placement decisions. Ideally, parents were involved as members of the team both during evaluation and placement. The use of consensus for team decision making was integral to the review and placement processes.

It was clear in the data that the current AU leadership was willing to share its success. The addenda indicated that AUs were very flexible about the application period start and end dates. Some districts indicated that they would accept applications on a rolling basis, reading each as they were submitted. Others indicated they had strict timelines and due dates. Still others indicated that they had a specific application and evaluation period, but would accommodate new families moving into the school district

as needed. The flexibility seemed to be an effort to accommodate families and provide the maximum opportunity to assess potential early access candidates.

The major themes that emerged from the data indicate communication, teamwork, and having a school district leader manage the entire early access evaluation process were essential elements of conducting successful processes. The survey results indicated that clear CDE Guidelines were extremely important. Having clear application procedures by individual school districts and AUs was also strongly recommended. Using a body of evidence that included nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures was also an essential aspect of successful early access processes.

Overall, the most common concept mentioned was the need for a *process* itself. Some participants described the necessity for a consistent step-by-step process for each early access applicant. Others referred to process as a screening process, an application process, having a waiver process, a decision-making process, or an identification process. Other responses highlighted the need for a process to manage disagreements if a parent had a concern about the early access evaluation. Having a clearly communicated application and evaluation process was of the utmost importance among respondents.

While analyzing the addenda, it was clear that the individual districts did not have all of the necessary assessment tools in place at the time of their initial submissions. Districts had to consider how and when existing human resources were assigned to accomplish early access assessments. No two districts approached the early access process in exactly the same way. Each participating district exercised their unique personnel talents and resources to meet the requirements of the legislation.

Though 27, 24, and 22 AUs received funding in the years 2013–2016, respectively, a total of 31 AUs in Colorado had early access addendum filed with the CDE. This data shows a slight yearly decline in total AUs receiving funds as well as the kindergarten and first grade students enrolled under the early access legislation. Less than half of the AUs in Colorado filed an early access addendum with the CDE, and less than a third who had an addendum admitted a student and received funding under the provisions allowed. This raises the question of how much time is necessary to achieve complete statewide adoption of early access.

Administrative unit leadership can be influential in the continued diffusion of early access as an innovation. According to Rogers (2013), diffusion is "communication among members of a social system" when they "create and share new information" and create shared understanding" (p. 5). By sharing their individual successes with neighboring districts, regional colleagues, and professionals across the state of Colorado, AU leaders can expand early access into a more widely accepted innovation.

Three ideas of why some districts had a process on file but had not used the process to identify gifted students emerged. Eleven districts reported they were part of a multidistrict AU and three of the 11 districts indicated that not all districts in the AU had agreed to the early access process, a requirement of the CDE (2016). Two respondents indicated they had used the process but not in the last five years, as "no parents had applied on behalf of their child in the last five years." Other district administrators reported that no students had ever applied, which they attributed to a lack of communication in their area and the fact that preschools did not know about or recommend early access.

Colorado House Bill 08-1021 provided specific ability and achievement criteria (CDE, 2016). HB 08-1021 allowed for local control when it came to creating and carrying out an early access evaluation and admission process to include a timeline and consistent communication samples, but stopped short of dictating that AUs must adopt the legislation. “House Bill 08-1021 created the opportunity for Colorado Administrative Units to accelerate highly advanced gifted children under age four for kindergarten and/or under age five for first grade pursuant to CRS 22-20-294(2)” (CDE, 2016, p. 3). The language “created the opportunity to Colorado AUs” has left the door open for AUs to simply not engage in an early access process or consider underage gifted learners. However, early access processes have been successful, enrolling more than 100 young gifted learners in Colorado, each year based on the 2013- 2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 funding data (CDE, 2016).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this retrospective mixed-methods study was to understand the positive aspects of early access processes according to those currently implementing an Early Access addendum. The study examined the history of early access in Colorado since the adoption of early access legislation. With eight years passed, and the initial students enrolled for the 2008–2009 school year attending middle school, it was time to consider the positive aspects of this process in Colorado. Individuals working with the very youngest gifted students were asked to share lessons learned with future leaders as they developed processes to identify and admit young gifted learners to school. Let us celebrate these pioneering "innovators" who created processes, identified bright young learners, and were willing to share their knowledge.

The survey tool was designed to gathered the collective reflections of the respondents on what they learned about the early access process as well as what districts changed or were eliminated from their original addendum. Successes were found. The overall outcomes shared through this study highlight the most positive factors that have led districts to evaluate, admit, and monitor Colorado's best and brightest young learners successfully. Voices of early access nonsupporters were also illustrated in the findings. It would have been remiss to omit these voices in the findings. Overall, these shared stories of success may serve as an inspiration to school district leaders not yet engaged in the early access process in their districts.

Research Questions Answered

The first research question asked: What are the most important aspects of early access processes according to those implementing early access? Considerable data were collected to answer this question. The most important aspects of early access processes include: (a) clear CDE guidelines, (b) clearly articulated application materials provided by each school district and AU, and (c) a body of evidence that includes nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures. These individual aspects of the process must be coupled with excellent communication among all stakeholders. Further, engaging a dedicated team of knowledgeable educators working together to support the needs of gifted young learners is essential. Early access is a student-focused process that requires financial and human resources to be fully successful.

The second research question asked: What aspects contribute to creating and conducting a successful Early Access Process in Colorado? The participants collectively shared that relationship building with families of early access candidates is essential. Working with a team of dedicated educators in decision making is also of great importance. Respondents emphasized the need for a body of evidence and clearly articulated timelines and criteria. These ideas combined to answer this research question.

Review of the Findings

The survey tool identified the top four main positive aspects of early access processes (ranked in order of importance): a clear set of guidelines for early access processes provided by the CDE, clearly established and articulated application procedures that were easily accessed by parents in each district or AU, nationally norm

referenced ability measures intended for the young child, and nationally norm referenced achievement measures intended for the young child.

From the narrative responses, the most important positive aspects of successful early access processes were varied, but all included a collaborative team approach. The team make-up was as diverse as each responding district, but always included one lead person with gifted education skills, an elementary administrator, and a kindergarten or first grade teacher. Often, a school psychologist and the parents were included in the team. The teams were cross-departmental and represented different perspectives. Parents, as a child's first teacher, were considered integral to the assessment and placement portions of early access. Multiple mentions were made about which team member would communicate the formal team placement decision to parents. The gifted lead or the local elementary principal was ultimately responsible for direct communication.

"Communication" was the most frequently mentioned word in the qualitative survey responses and the coded narrative portions of the early access applications. Communication was connected to community awareness and professional development for teachers and administrators. Communication came in the form of professional learning extended beyond the districts' teachers and leaders more broadly to include the private and parochial preschool providers in the community. Parent education sessions also came under the umbrella of communication.

Posting information on district websites was the most frequently mentioned communication method, followed by newspaper and newsletter advertisements. Invitations to attend parent nights and informational meetings open to community members to learn about early access was frequently mentioned as a successful

communication approach. The subject of what needed to be communicated centered around the purpose for early access and the opportunities early admission to school would provide. Communicating early access criteria and process information was important in the successes districts experienced. Just as important in the communication were mentions of what early access is not—a way around the Colorado school age law. Respondents and the coded documents corroborated that clear communication needed to reach a myriad of stakeholders. Communication is also an essential action in DOI theory needed to propel a new innovation toward complete diffusion: "Early adopters are more socially connected and assist with new concepts and innovations being shared, spread and expanded into common use" (Rogers, 2003, p. 290).

Collecting a complete body of evidence was critical to all respondents. Using the high standards set forth by the CDE were essential for identification consistency. Having a variety of ability, achievement, and readiness measures was essential. Having the opportunity to observe each child in their preschool setting and using an observation checklist was also considered an essential piece of data. Just as important as collecting the data was reassembling the early access team to discuss identification, admission, and best placement for each early access candidate.

There were many important factors in establishing early access in Colorado. The intent, articulated in the legislation, included "the need to serve gifted young learners who were academically ready for school, but were limited by their date of birth and not their innate abilities and readiness to engage in formal education" (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]). State legislators studied and drafted the bill after much processing and dialogue. The CDE leadership subsequently developed training tools and an application

process that was both informative and instructional. District leadership then had to have an understanding of the purpose for early access. District administrators needed to gather a team of educators who could develop a local process and implement it while communicating effectively to a variety of stakeholders within the school district and in the public sector using the state guidelines for early access assessment.

The most successful early access processes engaged a district-level coordinator responsible for selecting and administering nationally norm referenced measures for ability and achievement. It was also incumbent on that coordinator to ensure that all applicants were considered using the same clear and consistent process and criteria. Dedicating resources both in terms of dollars and staff were additional factors considered by each district prior to early access implementation.

Successes were measured in a variety of ways. To some districts, success was the admission of one early access kindergarten student in one year, and to another district success was seen when they advertised the early access process and parents came to an information night to learn about it, though none subsequently applied. Still others measured success when they evaluated siblings 2–3 years after an older brother or sister was admitted as an early access student, thus creating long-lasting school and family connections. Creating opportunities for the youngest learners inside a district's borders was the greatest reported success.

Three themes ran through the language of each narrative survey response. Process, communication, and teamwork were deemed essential ingredients for success. These same three themes emerged from the open-ended questions of the survey and from each initial early access program application reviewed. All three themes were necessary

components in a successful process. Communication alone was not enough—if there was not a team working together there was nothing to communicate. The process alone could not be successful without a collaborative team of cross-district stakeholders working the process to the benefit of students. Teamwork was essential but could not have survived independently if the team did not have a clearly communicated process and purpose for working together.

When the quantitative and qualitative survey data along with the coded data from the document review were compared, strong connections were drawn. Communication, process, and team were common threads woven throughout. Early access teams need to communicate effectively with all stakeholders in a timely manner. The teams need to provide clear consistent application processes information including a timeline, the assessment requirements, and portfolio submission guidance; and the early access requirements established by the CDE should be communicated to all stakeholders.

Implications of the Findings

This study may help to increase use of early access as a way to find, assess, and admit gifted young learners to school ahead of their age peers. Three years of data shows that hundreds of gifted young people have been admitted to school from 29 Colorado AUs. Colorado is a local control state. In education, the term *local control* refers to states in which the governing and management of public schools is largely conducted by elected or appointed representatives serving on governing bodies, such as school boards or school committees, that are located in the communities served by the schools (Colorado Association of School Boards, 2017). “So, unlike many of our sister states, local control in Colorado is not a matter of personal political views, national trends or

public opinion; it is a matter of state constitutional law" (Colorado Association of School Boards, 2017). In the case of early access, which remains optional legislation, each school district or AU has the authority to follow or not follow the legislation (CDE, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.08 [1] [e]).

Table 20 provides some excerpts from the narrative responses. Many responses identified the opportunities early access provided. One response noted "powerful potential" as an outcome when an AU had such a process in place; another stated that "it provides opportunity for gifted young children early in their educational careers." Another still said, "the fact that early access provides appropriate programming in curriculum, instruction, and assessment makes it worthwhile." Finally, another respondent summed up these ideas: "Early identification improves the likelihood that gifts will develop into talents."

Table 20
Compelling Reasons for Early Access

Positive Outcomes	Neutral to Negative Outcomes
"Opportunity for highly gifted."	"In place, already!"
"Quality programming early."	"In place when I got this job."
"Imperative."	"Already in place, but not used."
"Necessary."	"Did it only for legal reasons, but do not use the process."
"Incredibly important."	"It was recommended by the state."
"Doable, not overwhelming and beneficial"	"Done as part of the BOCES."
"Acceleration is a powerful tool in rural areas."	"Not necessary!"
"Fosters potential and provides appropriate programming."	"Costly and person heavy."
"Provides a challenge early in a child's schooling."	

This study identified the successes of early access in Colorado. However, there are 50 states in this nation. How are the needs of gifted young learners in the other 48

states beyond Colorado and Minnesota being met? As a nation, we need to promote excellence and not squander potential. Three years of funding data for Colorado early access placements indicated an average of 123 children per year were served by early admission to kindergarten and first grade (CDE, 2016). Multiply 123 children per year times 50 states and you arrive at a staggering number—7,150. Though state populations differ widely, it may stand to reason that a significant number of gifted students per year in the 50 United States could potentially be served by this kind of legislation.

With the support of the community partner, this study will be shared with state-level and regional gifted and talented leadership, as well as gifted education resource consultants. It is recommended that Colorado administrators be provided professional development about early access success annually. These findings may be disseminated through organizations such as the Colorado Association of School Executives, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Colorado Superintendents Council, the CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit leadership, and other state leadership groups. Such "networking and communication will do more to further the diffusion" of early access in Colorado (Rogers, 2003, p. 21).

Additionally, preschool and early childhood directors and teachers need to be aware that early access is a form of acceleration and a viable option for their students. By knowing the number of students advanced through early access processes, educators associated with a variety of national early childhood organizations such as the Association for Early Learning Leaders and the Early Childhood Directors Association can receive professional development about early access and support the continued diffusion of this option for gifted young learners. In the state of Colorado, the preschool

leadership groups include the Early Childhood Education Association of Colorado, Colorado's Early Childhood Professional Development Advisory, and the Association for Early Learning Leaders of Colorado, as well as the CDE division for Early Childhood Education.

Parent education and public awareness are extremely important considerations for early access as parents are the child's first teachers. Reaching public and private preschool providers and parents can serve to promote early access in Colorado. Parents, preschool teachers, and daycare providers know and understand a child's capabilities and are often the first to seek learning options that fit each child's needs. Information nights and parent education opportunities need to be created through community connections, Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parent Teach Associations (PTAs). Presentations at local parent affiliates of the Colorado Association for Gifted Children across the state are excellent opportunities to reach and teach parents and providers about gifted characteristics in young children.

The Colorado Association for Gifted Children and the NAGC need to be made aware of the results of this study through presentations and reports. There is a division of the NAGC dedicated to early childhood, which may provide a further way to disseminate these research findings. Sharing the findings with the Colorado Gifted State Advisory Committee and directly with the Colorado state school board would be additional avenues for continued communication about early access. Lobbying for the current optional legislation governing early access to move to mandatory status would change the slow adoption of early access and hasten the DOI. Looking beyond Colorado to the greater United States and internationally, addressing the World Council for Gifted and

Talented Children through its worldwide network could promote the Colorado successes, in turn sparking greater interest in early access globally.

Colorado school district leadership should understand the findings about the early access successes that exist in districts across the state. With this knowledge, they will be better equipped to determine if they will engage this innovation and opportunity for young learners in their communities. Data sharing could be done as part of presentations at regional administrative leadership meetings, at superintendents' council meetings, and as a part of professional development sessions held during the summer and winter Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) meetings. As Rogers (2003) suggested, innovation takes place over time, through social interactions and discussions:

> The innovation-decision period is the length of time required to pass through the innovation-decision process. Individuals vary in the innovation-decision period, with some people requiring many years to adopt an innovation, while other people move rapidly from knowledge to implementation. (pp. 21–22)

Preservice early childhood education programs at colleges and universities need to include study and class time dedicated to understanding gifted learners. This should include learning about gifted characteristics and identification of gifted students. Early access addresses one method of identification and differentiation for the youngest gifted learners. By having preservice educators trained to see gifted characteristics, they will be better equipped to advocate for appropriate programming and grade advancement for their students when necessary.

Crafting a specific step-by-step early access process can assist districts with limited financial and staff resources when considering engaging early access. Based on the results of this study, careful attention should be paid to creating an early access team

in each district to conduct consistent early access processes from assessment to placement and into progress monitoring. Clear, consistent communication is a key ingredient that will foster trust between families seeking early access for their child and professionals evaluating each candidate. Using a clearly articulated and communicated process that includes a body of evidence with nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures as well as anecdotal information about the child's social and emotional development and school readiness is essential.

It may be important to understand the possible motivation that led new districts to apply and become part of the "early majority" or part of the "late majority" or "laggards" as identified in DOI theoretical framework espoused in Rogers (2003). That remains beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, Gagné and Gagnier (2004) identified "a gulf between what research has revealed and what most practitioners believe" (p. 128). Herein may be an area that needs further study. The perceptions of educational professionals who are the ultimate decision makers in grade placement and grade acceleration may be at the root cause level for the infrequent practice of early entrance to kindergarten and first grade.

Limitations

The survey portion of the data collection was designed to take less than 15 minutes of a busy administrator's time. All of the brief yes/no and quantitative questions were posed at the beginning of the survey, and the open-ended response questions were placed at the end as they required the respondents to craft a response in their own words following Dillman et al.'s (2014) recommendations. Not all of the open-ended questions were answered completely by all respondents. In future research, the open-ended

questions may be better placed in the middle of the survey, allowing for more time and reflection. Most questions were posed to elicit positive outcomes and success stories; however, both negative and positive responses were recorded, some in direct nonsupport of early access.

Additionally, in retrospect, the one quantitative question asking respondents to rank order 13 aspects of the early access process was poorly crafted. It should have reversed the modal choices with one as most important and 13 as least important. In future research, this question could have been asked in another way, perhaps using multiple questions to compare the variables thus yielding the opportunity to run validity and correlation tests.

Future Recommendations

This study can serve as a catalyst for additional district leadership to consider engaging in a process to admit gifted young learners. By engaging in an early access process, a district will truly serve the entire school-aged population of gifted learners in their districts according to the Colorado definition of *gifted*, which includes learners aged 4–21 (CDE, 2015). Administrative unit leadership can be influential in the continued diffusion of early access as an innovation. According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is "communication among members of a social system" when they "create and share new information" and "create shared understanding" (p. 5). By sharing their individual successes with neighboring districts, regional colleagues, and peer professional across the state of Colorado, those already engaged in successful early access processes can move early access to be more widely accepted and adopted as an innovation.

Meeting with various state-level groups to share these findings will be key to changing acceleration policies and practices, as it will show administrators and others who have the power to make those changes that many parents and teachers actually do support acceleration (Siegle et al., 2013). A further recommendation is to share the positive aspects of early access processes with Colorado AUs considering an early access process. As this was the first study in Colorado to examine the positive aspects of the early access process, the collective wisdom of these gifted education professionals may be used to communicate their successes further. Visibility is important for an idea to become fully diffused (Rogers, 2003).

One cost effective consideration to expedite the inclusion of early access across Colorado may be to establish traveling evaluation teams who serve the needs of regions or AUs in Colorado that do not have the human or financial resources to assess potential gifted young learners with their current staffing. These traveling assessment teams may assist districts in urban and more rural areas, helping them establish their own processes and procedures or serving as consultants in the data collection and assessment phases.

Creating a plan complete with communication items and rating scales makes each process more portable within the state. Deciding to collect a portfolio or collect achievement data before ability measures (or vice versa) will lend more clarity to the process for new districts coming on board with early access. They can also work with the districts to review each child's body of evidence and make placement recommendations. Working side-by-side with peer professionals and modeling the process would allow district engagement to proceed in a scaffolded manner.

Can a system of mentors be established regionally to encourage and support districts engaging in the early access process for the first time? According to DOI theory, "it takes considerable time and effort to reach 100% acceptance or critical mass for new methods and procedures" (Rogers, 2003, p. 343). Colangelo (as cited in Assouline, 2015, p. 13) stated that acceleration "takes a decade or more sometimes just to move the needle a little bit. We are starting to see the movement toward acceleration."

Ongoing and refreshed professional development is necessary to teach and reteach district gifted leadership about early access and the benefits to young gifted learners. As previously noted, 70% of the survey respondents were not the same person who originally wrote or submitted the early access applications to the CDE. Turnover in gifted education leadership across the state of Colorado in the last eight years was evident through the document review process. "Re-invention, leads to greater sustainability" (Rogers, 2003, p. 183). With the constantly changing leadership in gifted education and school district administration, continual professional development can work to reinfuse the importance of considering gifted young learners in the administrator's purview.

Discussions in the state must continue regarding the best approaches to assess early learners. Colorado legislation leaves the process design to each individual AU (CDE, 2016). Is it necessary to use a cognitive measure before an achievement measure? Some districts felt strongly that ability measures should be determined at the onset of the process. Other districts considered the portfolio prepared by parents and the supporting letters from parents and preschool educators first before any formal nationally norm referenced achievement or ability measures were used. Still other districts collected the portfolios but administered achievement assessments as a first step in the process. If early

access portability is important, it seems reasonable to have an equally portable early access process as well. *Portability*, according to the CDE (2017) means that a student's state-approved identification in one or more categories of giftedness transfers to any district in the state. Gifted programming must continue according to the receiving district's programming options. Portability of identification is a part of the student's permanent record and advanced learning plan (C.C.R. 12.01 [21]).

"The Public Schools of Choice law allows resident pupils to enroll at schools in Colorado districts for which they are not zoned." This is also referred to as *open enrollment* **(**C.R.S. 22-36-101). With open choice, Colorado AUs vie for per-pupil dollars. If more Colorado AUs adopted the early access legislation, fewer parents may exercise their rights to open choice, leaving their neighborhoods to meet the needs of their young gifted children.

Future Research

Future studies should include a more fully developed survey instrument with fewer open-ended questions. Each open-ended survey question yielded input from 50% or less of the respondents per question. The qualitative data extracted from the open-ended questions supported the rank order quantitative findings of clear guidelines from the CDE, clear application and process information from individual AUs, and including nationally norm referenced ability and achievement measures. However, the responses were limited. The survey instrument lacked a basic correlation question that would allow groups of respondents to be compared to each other. All respondents were considered as one group.

Further study is needed on early access using a longitudinal approach looking at students who gained early admittance into kindergarten or first grade, tracking their progress, placements, and successes over their entire school history. After eight years of early access in Colorado, there is a large population of students who could be included in a longitudinal population (see Chapter 4). With the use of contemporary social media sources, it may be possible to keep track of 300 or more former students admitted to school early as they progress from K–12 public education into postsecondary life. Multiple case studies could be conducted using cohorts of early accessed kindergarteners separate from first graders who entered school ahead of age peers.

Collecting test data over time for cohorts of early access kindergarten and first grade students already admitted to school could provide evidence for a longitudinal study of student success based on early identification. The effects of this type of study could provide amplified evidence of successful early identification and placement. Though this would require the release of state testing data for each student, it could be done in such a way that it protects student personal identifiable information.

It would be beneficial to look at both the number of early access candidates considered each year by each AU and the number placed in either kindergarten or first grade. This could be done by uncovering the per-pupil dollars each AU receives annually for enrolled early access students. Funding data for three years was considered in this study. Obtaining data from the beginning of the early access legislation (2008) to the present may provide further insight. By uncovering this data, school executives and state leadership would be able to see if the data indicated a rising, steady, or declining number of early access students over time. Seeing data for all years available may illustrate an

increased need for early access and the benefit and support it can provide for this portion of the gifted population.

Another consideration for further study would be looking at the early access entrance data and comparing that to data collected after Grade one related to formal gifted identification according to the Colorado identification guidelines. Comparing the body of evidence used for early access admission to formal gifted identification universal screening results may reveal new information concerning the consistency of measurement tools and the accuracy for predicting the successes of gifted young learners.

Continued study could include collaboration with colleagues currently working to understand further the barriers that have prevented AUs in Colorado from engaging in early access procedures. Presenting the concerns as well as the successes in more detail could provide a more balanced approach to understanding and implementing the early access option in more Colorado AUs, thus moving toward 100% DOI (Rogers, 2003).

Attention should also be placed on specific nationally norm referenced tools that can be used to measure a young child's potential effectively. These measures must be age appropriate and be normed on a population that includes children aged three years four months and above. Further attention should be paid to providing all districts (urban, suburban, and rural) with equal access to CDE resources when evaluating young learners with potential.

It may be of interest in a follow-up study to consider how the early access legislation would look if it were changed from an optional process to one of requirement. Would there be an increased use of the legislation? Would districts comply with the legislation to find and serve more gifted underage learners if it were no longer optional?

Alternatively, would just as many districts have a process in the name of compliance, but not engage it? Creating a reporting method at both the state and national level that collects the statistics of success rather than the details of deficits could shine a light on the schools, districts, and AUs who are advancing children and meeting their academic needs through early access and other forms of acceleration. As Plucker (2013) states, "Very few states include indicators of advanced achievement in their K-12 education accountability systems. This omission sends the implicit message that advanced achievement is neither important nor a goal, and as a result, the vast majority of other education policies, systems, and interventions align with the indicators that focus attention elsewhere." (Plucker, 2013, p.24)

Imagine states being able to submit detailed statistics about student success through grade acceleration and subject advancement, early graduation from high school and dual enrollment in college while still enrolled in high school, or early acceptance to colleges and universities. Imagine further the rewards reaped when families moving to a new community could consider not dropout rates or failing test scores, but rather grade advancement opportunities and programming options that addressed the needs of gifted learners as they researched schools and neighborhoods. Perhaps additional funding sources could be created to incentivize schools to report such programs and successes.

A similar study could be conducted using a series of interviews with AU leadership engaged in an early access process. Collecting and coding the interview notes would allow for a fully developed phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2003, p.15).

Conclusion

This study uncovered many successes within early access processes in Colorado. The contributing AUs have been evaluating and admitting gifted young learners and intend to do so in the years to come. Through the eyes of those educators who have been actively engaged in early access processes, we have established a shared sense of best practice. We now know which body of evidence items are most important to practitioners when considering the young gifted learner. They include a strong body of evidence which includes measures of ability and achievement as well demonstrated readiness and a clear application and evaluation process.

Raising awareness about early access best practices was a major goal of this study. No longer is the lock step age/grade system of public education in the United States appropriate for all learners. Some learners need to move faster. As researchers in the field of gifted education, we are duty bound to explore carefully these possibilities. Studying the positive aspects of early access through the lens of DOI theory (Rogers, 2003) may help to expand the academic dialogue to include early access as a viable vehicle when addressing the needs of the youngest gifted students in every region of Colorado.

The question remains: how long will it take to have complete diffusion of early access in Colorado? Currently, in 2017, the age/grade lock step is still debated. Recently, the March 2017 edition of *Parenting for High Potential* was dedicated to academic acceleration. Here, Luckey and Grantham (2017) called for the attention of parents and practitioners on this issue, saying:

> Age—in general, students who are in the upper half of the age range of their current grade would simply be in the lower half of the age range in the new grade

> (assuming a one grade acceleration). In such a case, students would still be developmentally similar in many ways to their new classmates. (p. 5)

The evidence presented in this study from the state of Colorado practitioners who participated in the survey, may help to advance the whole-grade and early access acceleration conversations. According to Colorado educators dedicated to gifted education, early entrance to kindergarten and first grade are not harmful. It is time the innovation of early access is diffused throughout all of Colorado and the United States. We should now turn toward the task of "finding academically talented children and providing them early entrance to school" (Colangelo et al., 2004, p. 81). Assouline (2015), reflecting on the last decade of acceleration, stated: "When you do not believe in something, you demand nearly perfect evidence. If you are comfortable with an educational intervention, anecdotal evidence is plentiful and sufficient" (p. 14). Acceleration has long been discussed, but seemingly underutilized as an effective differentiation technique.

Experts in gifted education assert that early identification and appropriate educational interventions for gifted young children increases the probability of future extraordinary achievement and reduces the risk of later social, emotional, and educational problems (Harrison, 2004; Hodge & Kemp, 2000; Morelock & Friedman, 1992; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2002; Silverman, 1997; Stile et al., 1993; Whitmore, 1980). This is especially important as self-esteem and attitudes regarding learning and education are formed by a gifted child at a very early age (Roedell, 1989; Roeper, 1977, 1988). Indeed, gifted young children 0–8 years of age are among the most underserved children, even though early intervention has a significant effect on young

children's development (Barbour & Shaklee, 1998). Many early childhood programs are unequipped to meet the needs of preschoolers with precocious intellectual and academic abilities and or special talents (Pfeiffer & Petcher, 2008). As preschools are not prepared to address the needs of gifted young learners, it stands to reason that the doors of public K–12 education should be opened to accept this underserved portion of the gifted population (Pfeiffer & Petcher, 2008). Kindergarten and first grade in public schools with trained professionals would be a much better place to address the needs of gifted young learners grouped with their intellectual peers.

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APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY PARTNER AGREEMENT

COLORADO
Department of Education

Office of Gifted Education
Exceptional Student Services Unit

Memo

To: Ruthi Manning-Freeman
Lindsey Reinert

From: Jacquelin Medina, Director of Gifted Education

Date: April 9, 2016

Re: Community Partnership

I am available and interested in serving as your community partner. Early access is a statewide policy of particular significance when addressing the needs of specific young gifted learners. Your work has promise to uplift the importance of this policy and provide insight into how leaders can move such policy forward in their districts.

I will provide constructive feedback and support as you design and implement the phases of your doctoral study.

Thank you for initiating this important work.

CDE Director, Gifted Education

University of Denver Researcher

University of Denver Researcher

APPENDIX B: EARLY ACCESS STATUTE

House Bill 1021
Signed: May 2008
Effective: July 2008
Rules: August 2008

Gifted Education Unit: Early Access to Educational Services for Kindergarten & First Grade

What main points in HB 1021 impact administrative units/districts?

- House Bill 1021 reinstates a provision whereby districts may count in their enrollment and receive State Education Funds for highly gifted students who the administrative unit deems appropriate for early access to kindergarten or first grade.
- HB 1021 allows administrative units to decide whether early access will be permitted in the administrative unit.
- If an administrative unit permits early access, the district/s must abide by the rules of administration promulgated by the State Board of Education.
- The administrative unit makes the determination for early access placement based upon the Rules that will establish *criteria and a process that an administrative unit shall use to make determinations regarding the advanced placement of highly advanced gifted children*. 22-20-104.5
- The administrative unit may charge a fee to parents for early access assessment; except that, no fee will be charged to free and reduced lunch families.

If an administrative unit permits early access does it have to happen by fall 2008?

No. Administrative units (AU) may provide early access when the AU is ready to implement the conditions of HB-1021. For example, an AU may use the 2008-2009 school year to plan policy and procedures that align with the Rules; and, to implement professional development for educators and parents regarding the forthcoming early access requirements and procedures.

What child will benefit from HB 1021?

House Bill 1021 defines the 4 or 5 year old child who may benefit from early access as a "highly advanced gifted child". This child is academically gifted, socially and emotionally mature, in the top 2% or less of the gifted peer group, motivated to learn, ready for advanced placement, and has exhausted the resources of preschool or home schooling.

The intent of HB 1021 is to meet the unique needs of the "highly advanced gifted child". It does not permit early access to all gifted 4 or 5 year olds. Quality preschool programs will meet the needs of most gifted children. Acceleration is an option that may also be considered in future years.

How will preschool and kindergarten educators and parents learn about HB 1021?

Communication is a shared responsibility. The Colorado Department of Education will post information on the CDE web site and provide information to superintendents, gifted education directors, and public and private preschools. Administrative units will need to: 1) provide access to information; 2) educate members of its teaching staff and community about the district's policy and procedures for the implementation of early access.

What criteria will the Rules address?

House Bill 1021 requires the Rules to conser: aptitude, achievement, performance, readiness for advanced placement, observable social behavior, motivation to learn, and support from parents, teachers, and school administrators.

What elements of an early access process will the Rules include?

House Bill 1021 requires the Rules to include: time line, involved personnel, evaluation, a body of evidence, decision making, and monitoring of student performance after early access.

APPENDIX C: SURVEY PARTICIPATION CONSENT

Dear Fellow Gifted and Talented Coordinator/Director,

My name is Ruthi Manning-Freeman, and I am a graduate student attending the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about early entrance to school (kindergarten or first grade) for underage gifted learners. You are eligible to be in this study because you are named on the database maintained by the Colorado Department of Education Exceptional Student Services Office as the contact person for your school district/administrative unit responsible for gifted programming.

If you choose to participate in this study through this online survey, you will be contributing to statewide data collection about House Bill 08-1021 Early Access. There is no funding for this project; it is solely for the purpose of research and research data collection.

Participation is completely voluntary. There are no personal identifying questions that will be asked of you. You may choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to be part of the study, or have any questions about the study, please e-mail or contact me at Ruthi.Manning-Freeman@du.edu.

My doctoral advisor is Dr. Norma Hafenstein, norma.hafenstein@du.edu. Dr. Hafenstein can be reached via e-mail or by phone at 303-871-2527 should you need any clarification.

Thank you in advance for your support of my work.

Ruthi Manning-Freeman

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question	Rationale for the Question	Rationale for Format	Connection from Literature
3. Please select the region of Colorado where the school district or Administrative Unit (AU) you represent is located.	Collect geographic information about the respondents' locations for possible trends or relationships	Closed response, select one response – To quantify the responses	Demographic question regarding Colorado location
4. Please select the descriptor from the list below that best describes your district's total current enrollment.	Collect school district size information for possible trends or relationships	Closed response, select one response – To quantify the responses	Demographic question regarding school size of AUs engaged in early access
5. Are you the district level administrator responsible for gifted education reporting?	Collect school district leadership information for possible trends or relationships	Forced choice – Yes or No	Demographic question regarding gifted lead responsibility
6. Do you have the Colorado K–12 Gifted Endorsement on your teaching license?	Collect endorsement information for trends and relationships	Forced choice – Yes or No (CDE, 2016)	Demographic question regarding Colorado gifted endorsement
7. For how many years have you been responsible for gifted programming in your current district?	Collect longevity information for possible trends and relationships	Closed response, select one response – To quantify the responses.	DOI theory of time and communication in a social system (Rogers, 2003)
8. Does the school district you represent have a policy for whole grade acceleration?	Collect information about policy for trends and relationships	Forced choice – Yes or No	Administrative connection and support (Plucker 2013)
9. Does the school district you represent have a policy for early access?	Collect information about policy for trends and relationships	Forced choice – Yes or No	Administrative connection and support (Plucker, 2013)
10. Please rate your level of understanding about the early access process.	Collect information about participants' knowledge of early access for trends and relationships	Likert scale question that requires self-rating	"Early Access Guidance Document, Appendix F" (CDE, 2016)

11. Has the school district/AU you represent, during your tenure or before, used an early access process to identify and admit any underage gifted learners into kindergarten or first grade?	Collect information about participants' knowledge about the prior use of early access for trends and relationships	Forced choice – Yes or No If no, respondent skips to the last question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
12. In your opinion, which aspects of the process outlined in Colorado House Bill 1021 Early Access legislation are the most helpful in your district/AU's successful assessment and identification of early access children?	Collect information about aspects of the early access process which are considered most important for trends and relationships	Rank order – To collect levels of knowledge given a variety of topics to quantify responses	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
13. In addition to the checklist above, what are the factors that make your district/ AU's process successful?	Collect information about the respondents' advocacy about the early access process in their district to determine possible trends or themes	Text entry response – Due to the vast amounts of possible answers to this question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
14. In your opinion, how important is early access?	Collect information about the participants' importance level regarding early access for trends and relationships	Likert scale question that required self-rating	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
15. What was the compelling reason your school district chose to be an early adopter and engage in an early access process?	Collect information about the compelling reasons participants' districts initiated the early access process for trends and relationships	Text entry response – Due to the vast amounts of possible answers to this question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9]; Rogers, 2003)

16. What success has your school district/ AU experienced that you would most want to share with another district if they were creating an early access process?	Collect information about the successes learned through initiating an early access process for trends and relationships	Text entry response – Due to the vast amounts of possible answers to this question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
17. In a brief narrative, please share your greatest learning, both positive and negative, from creating, managing, and implementing an early access process.	Collect information about the lessons learned while running an early access process for trends and relationships	Text entry response – Due to the vast amounts of possible answers to this question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])
18. Your school district has an early access addendum filed with CDE, but has not admitted any students using the process. To what do you attribute that?	Collect information about the reasons a district has an early access process, but has not used the process to admit underage gifted learners for trends and relationships	Text entry response – Due to the vast amounts of possible answers to this question	(Colorado Department of Education, 2017, ESEA Rule 12.01 [9])

APPENDIX E: EARLY ACCESS FAST FACT SHEET

COLORADO
Department of Education

FACT SHEET

Guidelines for Early Access Enrollment & Count

Office of Gifted Education

Advanced Highly Gifted Students

Early Access Addendum

Pursuant to CSL 22-20-204(2) administrative units may permit early access to kindergarten to a highly gifted advanced 4-year-old and early access to first grade to a highly gifted advanced 5-year-old. Gifted education directors and coordinators determine with their superintendent if early access will be permitted in the administrative unit and an early access addendum filed with CDE.

A list of early access administrative units is maintained on the CDE Web site: http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/adminstrativeunitearlyaccesslisting2013-2014

The administrative unit at the school district, board of cooperative services or the state Charter School Institute must file a written early access addendum to the AU's Program Plan. The AU's initial early access addendum must be filed for approval with the Gifted Education Unit at the Department of Education by January 1 prior to the fiscal year of implementation. (For example: Eligible addendums for fiscal year 2015-2016 must be submitted by January 10, 2015). In subsequent years, updates to the addendum should be submitted by April 15 along with the annual AU program plan (UIP GT Addendum) and budget.
The early access addendum template and checklist are located on CDE's Web page: http://cde.state.co.us/gt/resources.htm

Documentation

For every early access student, the administrative unit must ensure that the following provisions are implemented and clearly documented for financial auditing purposes.

- The administrative unit at the school, district, Board of Cooperative Services, or the state Charter School Institute must have on file with the CDE a written early access addendum for the AU's comprehensive program plan in gifted education.
  - An early access addendum template and checklist of components are located on the CDE Web page: http://cde.state.co.us/gt/resources.htm
- When a student is determined for early access, an advanced learning plan (ALP) shall be developed collaboratively with staff and parents no later than 30 days after the start of school.
  - The ALP is evidence that the student is identified as a student with exceptional potential/ability; and that a plan is being implemented to support grade acceleration.

Student Types

"Highly advanced gifted child" means a gifted child whose body of evidence demonstrates a profile of exceptional ability or potential compared to same-age gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, early access to educational services may be considered as a special provision.

- *The early access provisions benefit only a few highly advanced gifted children.*
- *The legislation is not for the majority of age 4 or age 5 gifted students who are served in preschool and kindergarten programs.*
- Early access is "grade acceleration". The ALP must contain VISIBLE language that indicates "**grade acceleration**" or "**early access**".

September 2014

- The advanced learning plan must record on the front of the paper document, and/or in the first screen page or front of a student's electronic ALP: 1) the date of ALP development/review with parents; and, 2) a clear label stating EARLY ACCESS STUDENT OR GRADE ACCELERATION.
- The same documentation must be clear on the early access child's grade one ALP: date of the development/review of ALP; and, a clear label stating that the student is an EARLY ACCESS STUDENT OR GRADE ACCELERATION for grade one. If grade one involves an ALP review after early access into kindergarten, the ALP review date for grade one must be near the one year anniversary of the initial kindergarten ALP date. (After grade one this designation is not necessary for state funding.)

Funding

To obtain part time funding for a 4-year-old student entering Kindergarten or fulltime funding for a 5-year-old entering first grade the following requirements must be recorded clearly for state financial audits. Failure to meet the requirements for funding may result in loss of funds to the administrative unit/district.

1. The district being audited is listed on the "List of Administrative Units with Early Access Provisions" provided on the CDE Web page: http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/adminstrativeunitearlyaccesslisting2013-2014

    a. The AUs on this list ensure that its member schools or districts implement the process and procedures described in the AUs early access addendum.

2. The early access student has reached the desired age (4 or 5) by the start of school. Start dates must be easily accessible to auditors either through data pipeline or recording on the ALP.

3. The early access student has an initial ALP dated no later than 30 days after the start of school. The start date and the ALP development date must be clear and accessible to auditors.

4. The early access Kindergarten student has evidence of an initial ALP dated no later than 30 days after the start of school and after moving to the first grade has evidence of an ALP review date close to the one year anniversary date of the kindergarten year's ALP date. Both documents have a clear label stating EARLY ACCESS or GRADE ACCELERATION.

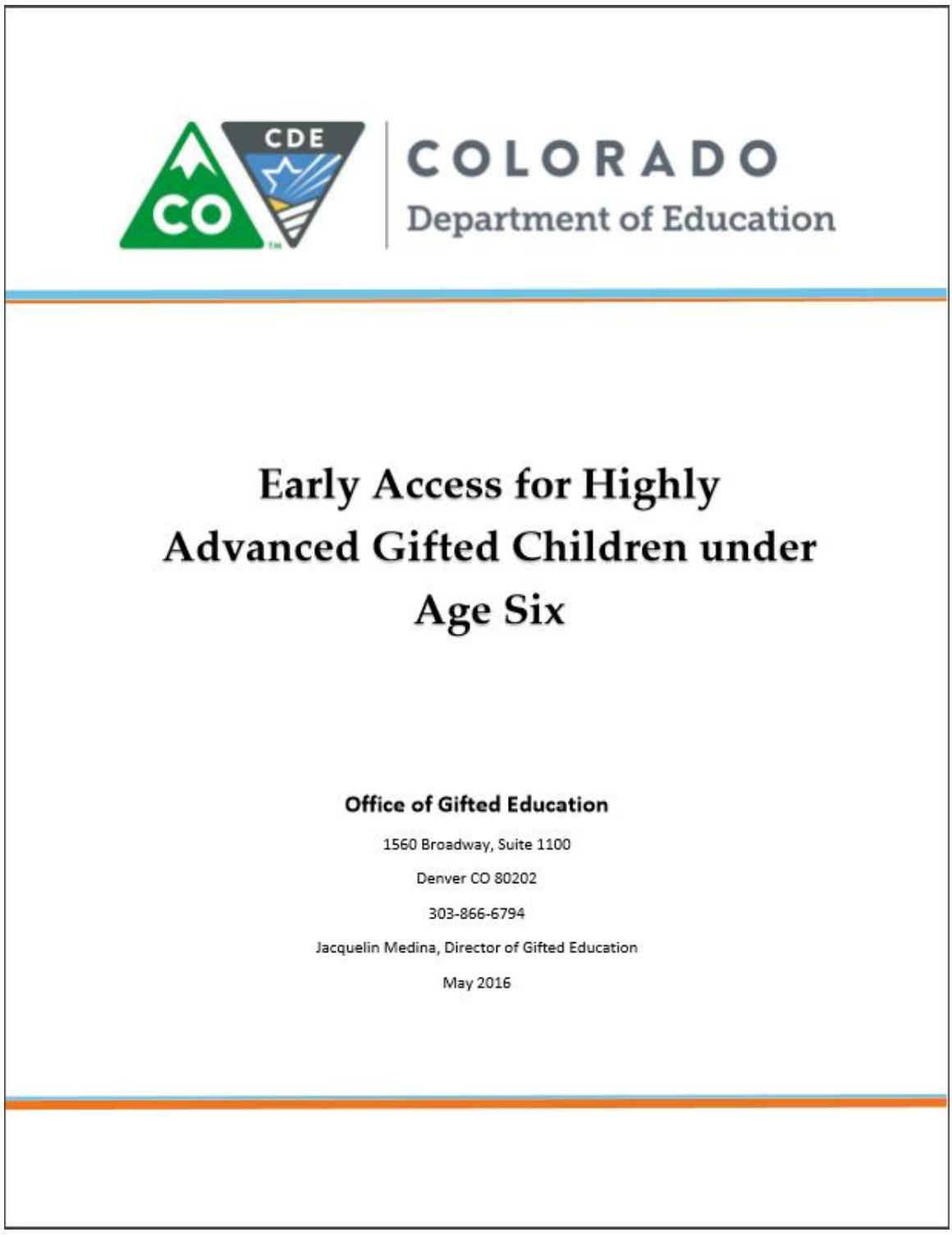
    An initial early access first-grade student has evidence of an ALP dated no later than 30 days after the start of school with a clear label stating EARLY ACCESS or GRADE ACCELERATION.

Notes:
If documentation is unclear, fiscal auditors may request additional documentation.

In a given audit year, the district may be asked to submit documentation regarding 4 and 5 year old early access students by November 10.

After the initial year of "early access" (First grade for a student who had early access starting in Kindergarten), the district should continue the ALP process from kindergarten, as well as documentation showing when the annual review was conducted. The ALP is an annual planning and accountability tool for gifted student achievement and growth.
Reference: 22-54-103(10)(b)(I)(B), C.R.S. and 22-54-103(10)(a)(IV)(B), C.R.S.

APPENDIX F: 2016 EARLY ACCESS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT



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Introduction

House Bill 08-1021 created the opportunity for Colorado administrative units (AUs) to accelerate **highly advanced** gifted children under age 4 for kindergarten and/or under age 5 for first grade pursuant to CRS 22-20-204(2). The Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA) is Colorado's primary law with requirements for the implementation of specific elements and procedures for gifted education programs. ECEA Rules provide AUs guidance for the implementation of **early access** as well as clarify provisions for AUs to receive state education funds for early access children.

Definitions

Early access means early entrance to kindergarten or first grade for highly advanced gifted children under age six. Children for early access are exceptionally precocious and ready for school earlier than their same-age peers. Academic achievement, reasoning ability, performance and motivation are keen compared to other gifted children.

"Highly advanced gifted child" means a gifted child whose body of evidence demonstrates a profile of exceptional ability or potential compared to same-age gifted children. To meet the needs of highly advanced development, early access to educational services may be considered as a special provision.

AU Responsibilities

The administrative unit at the school district, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) or the state Charter School Institute **must** file a written early access addendum to the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan in order to receive per-pupil funding for an early access student. Per-pupil funding shall only be provided to an AU if an Early Access Addendum has been approved by the Colorado Department of Education, the student meets all criterion for early access admittance and an Advanced Learning Plan is developed by September 30.

Early Admittance versus Early Access

A district shall count and receive funding for pupils enrolled in kindergarten who are five years old as of **October 1** [C.R.S. 22-54-103]. However, a district has the autonomy to set an earlier enrollment date for admittance into kindergarten. For example, if a district sets July 1 as its cut-off date for a student to be five to enroll into kindergarten, and a child will turn five in September, the district determines if the student is admitted into kindergarten. In this case, the district still receives per-pupil funding for the student because he/she will be five by October 1. This is considered early **admittance** based on the district's enrollment policy, but not early **access**. If a child turns five after October 1 and wants to be considered for kindergarten admittance, the district may choose to admit the student and receive no per-pupil funding, or if the district/AU has an approved early access program plan, conduct the early access assessment process to determine if the child meets early access criteria.

Purpose

Early access shall not be an acceleration pattern recommended for the majority of age 4 or age 5 gifted children who will benefit from preschool gifted programming that responds to the strength area. The purpose of early access is to identify and serve the few highly advanced gifted children who require comprehensive academic acceleration [12.08(1)(c)].

Many young gifted children are ready for advancement in one or two areas of development. Full grade acceleration at this young age may not be appropriate; however, grade level acceleration may be considered at another point in time. Regular public or private preschools or home schooling meet the needs of the majority of gifted 4 and 5 year olds.

> Early-entry children – those who started school early because they were ready to learn – perform as well as or better than their older classmates in a wide range of tests and evaluations. Research also shows the children are well-adjusted socially and suggests early-entry is a positive experience for the gifted child.
>
> A Nation Empowered, 2015

Early access is intended to support students who are evaluated to be exceptional in aptitude/cognitive reasoning, academics, school readiness and motivation. Longitudinal studies report that early access children excel academically, participate in extra-curricular activities, exhibit strong positive concepts; some may require acceleration again later in their educational career. The benefits to students who qualify for early access include: integrating early childhood and gifted educational programming to expand access to curriculum, instruction and assessment aligned to the child's level of challenge. Additionally, early access fosters friendships and social-emotional growth closer to the child's developmental level.

Considering Early Access

> *"A sensitivity to the special needs of young gifted children can make a significant difference to their future development and happiness"*
>
> Joan Franklin Smutney

Early access is a local decision of the administrative unit. If an AU determines early access will be provided as a gifted programming service, constituent schools or districts must abide by the requirements established in the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan. When considering early access, superintendent/s, early childhood and gifted education staff should hold conversations about the meaning of early access, benefits to children, existing policy or procedures that support early access thinking. If an AU

determines early access will be permitted, provisions are embedded in the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan for Gifted Education pursuant to rule section 12.08. An Early Access Addendum is a supplement to the Program Plan provided to the Colorado Department of Education before the initial implementation of early access. An AU may choose to limit early access consideration to only AU residents and/or to charge a nominal fee for the assessment process.

Process

The AU shall establish a collaborative process among parents, preschool, general and gifted educators and school administration for evaluating early access referrals. The process implemented shall include the following components [12.08(2)(e)-(v)]:

Timelines – [12.08(2)(e)(i)]

- Applications for early access are due by April 1 for the next school year. Each AU shall declare when it will begin accepting applications.
- Determinations shall be made within 60 calendar days of the AU receiving the child's portfolio submitted by the child's parent or legal guardian in accordance with Section 12.08(2)(e)(iii)(A) of these Rules.
- For referrals received after April 1, the AU may, at its discretion, consider the child's information, provided the determination is made by September 1 or by the start of the upcoming school year, whichever is earlier.
- A student shall be age 4 by October 1 for kindergarten; and, age 5 by October 1 for first grade.

Communication – [12.08(2)(a)]

Early access communication is provided to all stakeholders via multiple platforms including but not limited to websites, brochures and/or handbooks. Communication shall include:

- Information about the criteria and process for identifying a highly advanced gifted child for whom early access is deemed appropriate, time frames, portfolio referral, deadlines, specific tests and threshold scores used to make final determinations concerning such a student;

- Professional development of educators or other means to increase the understanding of a highly advanced gifted child and the educational needs of such a student;
- A method for collaborative efforts among preschool, general and gifted education personnel and parents; and
- An Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) for the highly advanced gifted child determined appropriate for early access.

Personnel – [12.08(2)(e)(ii)]

The AU shall identify personnel at the AU, district, and/or school level who will be involved in the early access process based on the following list. Designated personnel may serve in multiple capacities during the early access process. Personnel includes:

- A person designated to collect portfolio referrals;
- Educators designated to collect data used in a body of evidence including the test examiner(s), early childhood teacher(s), a gifted education resource person, and others as identified by the AU (e.g., a performance assessment team, principal);

- A determination **team** consisting of an AU level or school level gifted education resource person, a teacher in early childhood, and others as identified by the AU (e.g., principal, psychologist, counselor, parent);
- A support team during transition including the receiving teacher and school administrator, parents, and gifted education/early childhood personnel; and
- Other persons helpful in collecting data or making determinations, including the person who assisted in developing the screening portfolio.

Evaluation – [12.08(2)(e)(iii)]

The AU shall describe the implementation steps for early access evaluation. An AU has the autonomy to determine the procedural order of the following evaluation steps. Upon receiving an early access application, it is the discretion of the AU to request initial screening, testing, or an interview to inform a decision to accept the screening portfolio and continue with the remainder of the implementation steps. The implementation steps shall include but need not be limited to:

I. Screening Portfolio

Parents are responsible for collecting the information required for an early access portfolio application and for submitting the portfolio to the appropriate AU personnel. The AU must describe the requirements for an application portfolio that shall include:

- Applicant contact information;
- A screening tool completed, individually, by the parent and the child's current teacher; or, if the child is not in school, by the parent and another adult who knows the child from other early childhood experiences; and
- Information about the performance of the child that provides evidence of a need for early access evaluation (e.g., work samples, data from the child's current teacher or an adult from early childhood experiences, or indicators of early access readiness factors).

II. Referral

The AU shall designate the gifted education director/coordinator, principal, or other qualified person, to accept the referral portfolio provided by the parent and make an initial decision as to whether early access assessment should continue.

III. Testing and a Body of Evidence

The AU shall conduct the necessary tests and collect student information including test results accepted pursuant to Rules. The body of evidence is complete if data regarding **all** criteria and other considerations deemed necessary by the AU are compiled for data analysis and decision making.

> A determination team analyzes multiple criteria from a body of evidence resulting in a student profile of strengths, needs and interests of the child.
>
> ECEA Rules

IV. Decision Making

Early access decisions will be a consensus process within the determination team that analyzes multiple criteria from a body of evidence resulting in a student profile of strengths, needs and interests of the child. Test scores alone will **not** determine early access. If the team cannot reach consensus, the building principal or the gifted education director/coordinator shall make the final decision in accordance with the AU's early access program plan.

Advanced Learning Plans must be completed by September 30 for all early access students. The ALP must include the phrase, "grade acceleration."

ECEA Rules

V. Determination Letter

A determination letter will be signed by members of the determination team and the parent and forwarded for signature of the receiving teacher and principal if they are not on the determination team. Parents may accept or decline the offer of early access. When a child is deemed appropriate for early access, an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) shall be developed according to the AU's procedures, but no later than the end of the first month after the start of school or September 30, whichever comes first. The ALP shall include academic and transition goals. The ALP must state that the student was enrolled through early access for the years the student is in kindergarten (if applicable) and first grade, so that state auditing requirements are met and district may receive per-pupil funding.

If the determination team finds the child gifted, but does not find that the child meets the criteria for early access, the team will provide the child's school with the child's assessment portfolio for serving the area of exceptionality in the child's public preschool or public kindergarten program.

If the student transfers to another public school in Colorado during the first year of an early access placement the new AU shall maintain the placement.

Monitoring of Student Performance – [12.08(2)(e)(iv)

The student's teacher shall monitor student performance at least every five weeks during the student's first year of early access. The monitoring process shall be based on the Advanced Learning Plan and performance reports shared with the parents and child.

Procedures for Disagreements – [12.08(2)(e)(v)]

Procedures for disagreements for early access shall be in accordance with Section 12.06 of ECEA Rules.

Optional Fee – [12.08(2)(b)]

The AU **may** charge parents a reasonable fee for assessment and other procedures performed for the purpose of identifying a highly advanced gifted child and making determinations for early access.

- The AU shall describe the fee related to the implementation of the referral, testing and/or decision making processes;
- No charge shall be assessed if the child who is the subject of such assessments is eligible for a reduced-cost meal or free meal pursuant to the federal National School Lunch Act•, 42 U.S.C.§1751,et seq.

- When evaluating the need for fees, the AU will:
  - Integrate the costs of assessment and decision making into the ongoing general instructional and assessment practices conducted by early childhood and gifted education personnel to the maximum extent possible;
  - Take into account the economic circumstances of the community and applicant's family; and
  - Consider test results within three months of application from outside licensed professionals paid by the parent.

Funding & Reporting – [12.08(2)(c)]

Administrative units that permit early access shall receive funding from the state education fund created in Article IX, Section 17(4) of the Colorado Constitution.

AUs shall:

- Report age four and age five gifted children provided early access using date of birth, grade level placement and gifted student designations on the October Enrollment Count;
- The early access student for grades K and 1st **must** have an ALP on file by September 30 of each early access year to be verified and counted in the October enrollment. The phrase, "grade acceleration," must be clearly written or marked on the student's ALP in order to receive funding.

Identification of Early Access Students

Procedures for Body of Evidence

A comprehensive body of evidence is collected during the early access process. A body of evidence must contain both qualitative and quantitative data to measure exceptionality. An AU determines **when** the early access process will open and the order in which data will be collected. The AU should follow application timelines pursuant to Rules (see Timelines, page 5). The process typically begins when a parent initiates a request for an early access application from the AU Gifted Lead. Any parent who requests an application has the right to complete and submit an application to the AU. Upon receiving the completed application, the AU Gifted Lead may conduct a preliminary screening, test or interview to determine if the child might be an appropriate candidate for the early access evaluation process prior to the submission of a student portfolio. The parent is responsible for collecting all portfolio documents.

I. Student Portfolio

The AU determines what documents should be included in a student portfolio pursuant to Rules. Documents may include but are not limited to:

- AU early access application form
- Contact information
- Copy of child's birth certificate
- Release of student information form
- Any previous assessment data (if applicable)
- Proof of residence (if applicable)
- Application fee (if applicable)
- Letter stating the reasons for considering early access for their child
- Letter of recommendation from a previous teacher, mentor and/or coach
- Examples of reading, writing, math, problem solving and creativity ability
- Norm-referenced or standardized screening tool or questionnaire

II. Determination Team Procedures

Upon the submission of a completed application and student portfolio, a team of educators knowledgeable of gifted education and early childhood development evaluates the application using a qualitative rating scale or rubric. Based upon the subjective and objective review, the early access education team determines if the child is an appropriate candidate for the next level of the early access assessment process. If it is deemed the child is not a candidate for additional evaluation, the parent/guardian is notified of the team's decision.

III. Assessment

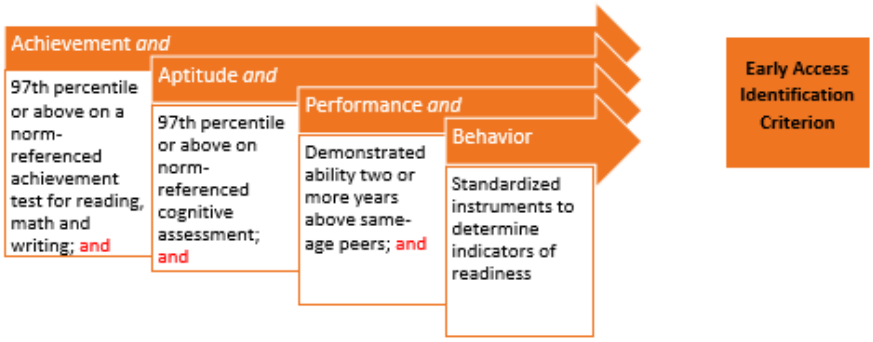
The next step in the early access process is conducting identification assessment. **See the Resource section for a list of commonly used early access assessments.** A complete assessment profile includes:

IV. Criteria for Identification

All criteria must be considered in making the determination. Test scores alone do not meet the standards of a determination. A student may score at the 97th percentile or above on aptitude and achievement tests but not have data that supports school readiness. Every child with a score above

97th percentile may not benefit from early access to kindergarten or first grade. Early access decisions will be a consensus process. If the team cannot reach consensus, the building principal or the gifted education director/coordinator shall make the final decision in accordance with the AU's early access program plan. The decision as to whether a student qualifies for early access is at the sole discretion of the AU.

The following pathway meets criteria for early access identification.



V. Support Systems

The AU shall define and implement a support system to assist in a child's success in and transition through early access by evidence of:

- A letter of determination of the early access decision signed by the parent, gifted education staff, early childhood staff, the receiving teacher and building administrator indicating recognition and support of the child's placement (determination letters will be placed in the child's cumulative file);
- A transition goal in the child's Advanced Learning Plan for the first year of early access;
- Methods of communication with the student about school success; and
- Methods for parent-teacher communication.

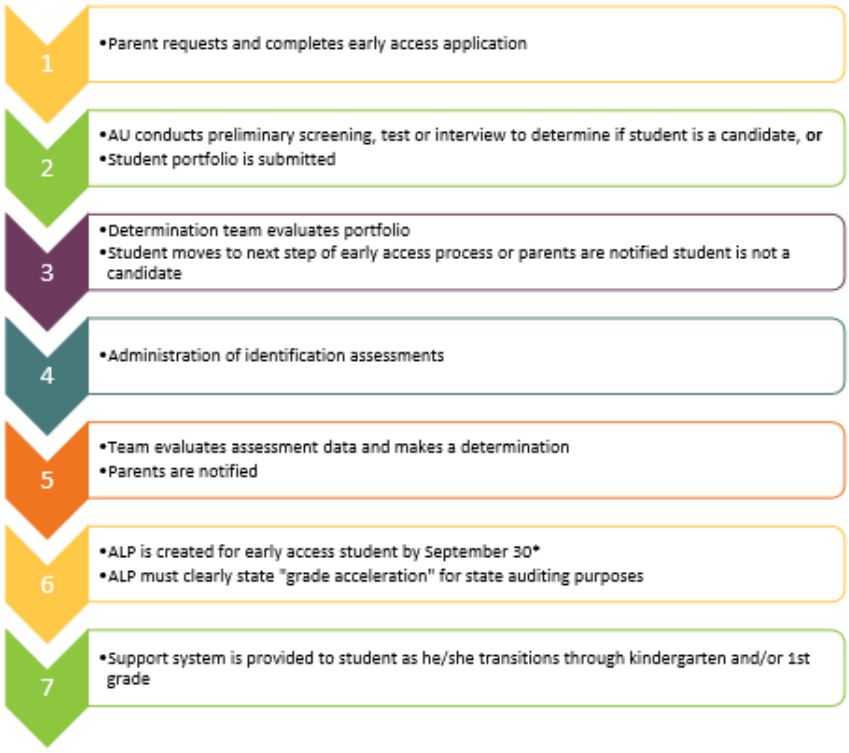
The AU will describe how parents, teachers, school administrators and the learning environment will contribute to a positive support system [12.08(2)(d)(v)].

Portability and Early Access:
If the child moves from the original administrative unit of early access, the placement is maintained in other administrative units statewide.

ECEA Rules

Reviewing the Early Access Process

An AU has the autonomy to determine the procedural order of the early access evaluation process.



*For information about Advanced Learning Plans, visit the Gifted Education Website and access the ALP Guidance Document.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt

Developing an Early Access Plan

The Early Access Addendum is submitted with the **AU's Comprehensive Program Plan** or in years when the Comprehensive Program Plan is not submitted, an addendum may be submitted to the Office of Gifted Education by January 1 preceding the initial school year in which early access will be permitted. An AU may wish to consider the following steps:

- Hold conversations with the superintendent/s, early childhood and gifted education staff about the meaning of early access, benefits to children, existing policy or procedures that support early access thinking;
- Discuss local attitudes and issues about early access with stakeholder groups;
- Decide if early access will be permitted in the administrative unit;
- Verify structures for early access and needs for enhancements to the infrastructure;
- Review and identify personnel most capable to facilitate the testing, criteria and process for early access;
- Ensure training and understanding of the early childhood sensitivities for personnel involved in the process;
- With a team of local representation, determine the administrative unit's approach to communication, criteria, tools and process for making early access determinations using the ECEA rules section 12.08 as a guide; and
- Prepare and submit an Early Access Addendum to the AU's Comprehensive Program Plan.

Checklist for Key Requirements of an Early Access Plan	
	Criteria and the process for early access are explained and accessible to parents, educators and the public
	Professional development is provided to preschool, general and gifted education personnel, and principals
	Early access determinations are made through a collaborative process among parents, preschool, general and gifted education and school administration
	If a fee is charged, there is evidence it is reasonable and there is no fee for students eligible for free and reduced lunch
	AU describes the methods and tools used to make early access determinations
	Criteria in a body of evidence include referral by a parent or educator, student profile of strengths, performance, readiness, needs and interests
	A cognitive score of 97th percentile or above is required along with an achievement score of 97th percentile or above in reading, writing and mathematics
	Performance tools indicated by work samples demonstrates ability above age peers
	Tools are used to measure readiness, social behavior and motivation appropriate for early access

	A support system to assist a child's success includes: Letter of determination signed by parent, gifted staff, early childhood staff, receiving teacher and school administrator support early access; Transition goal in ALP for first year; Methods of communication between school and parents; How parents, teachers and school will contribute to a positive support system
	Applications for early access are due by April 1 for the next school year
	Determinations are made within 60 calendar days of the AU receiving the child's portfolio submitted by the child's parent
	Referrals received after April 1 are at discretion of AU, provided determination is made by September 1 or the start of the upcoming school year, whichever is earlier
	Students are age 4 by October 1 for kindergarten; and, age 5 by October 1 for first grade
	Personnel trained in gifted education are included in the early access determination team and qualified personnel administer required assessments
	Requirements for the screening portfolio are clearly stated for parents
	A screening tool is used for parent and teacher input
	Performance data include portfolio and qualitative and quantitative data
	Determinations are a collaborative consensus process
	Early access students have a completed ALP by September 30
	If a child is identified as gifted but does not quality for early access, identification information is provide to school serving the gifted student
	Progress monitoring is evident at least every 5 weeks during the first year of early access and recorded in the ALP
	There is a procedure for early access disagreements

Resources

Characteristics of Young Gifted Students

The highly advanced gifted child is a minority even among gifted children. The child's capacity to learn is significantly advanced even beyond the average for the intellectually and academically gifted.

One strong indicator that a child may be highly gifted is the early development of speech, coupled with an unusually speedy progression through the stages of speech development. In her study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (1993) recorded linguistic precocity far beyond even that of moderately gifted children. The gifted children were able to link words into meaning earlier and with greater degrees of complexity than were their age peers. Early and fluent speech was also linked to excellent memory. Children in the study could recite poetry, passages from books and songs before the age of two. The accelerated development of speech and language reflect not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well. Comprehension, retention, vocabulary, stored information and logical abilities are often superior.

The highly advanced gifted child is a quick learner and can be passionate about learning. Often they are self-directed, highly energetic and goal oriented. For this reason, it is difficult for them to be confined to a curriculum that doesn't meet their needs.

Parents typically note that their child seemed to catch on to things effortlessly, was insatiably curious and had extraordinary memory. Parents report that their child reads a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; and is fascinated with numbers. The highly advanced gifted child is also more likely than other children their age to have collections, especially scientific collections. Many parents reported their child to be well-rounded, socially adjusted and physically developed.

In early years, the highly advanced gifted child may show signs of alertness and long attention spans. Preference for novelty is seen as early as infancy in terms of frequent desire for visual changes. They often sit, crawl and walk several months earlier than normal. High energy sometimes leads to hyperactivity when they are insufficiently simulated. Even at a young age, these children may be aware of their own problem-solving strategies and use them to solve new problems. Handwriting is often a struggle; and they are bored with the goal to be neat. Their friends are often older children or adults. Affectively, highly advanced gifted children may show intense reactions to noise, pain and frustration. They are interested in moral and political problems and may worry about evil in the world (Winner, 1996).

Children who are highly gifted may have special problems of development that are correlated with social isolation. Most often age-mates do not share their interests, vocabulary or desire for more complex activities. These difficulties appear particularly acute at ages 4 through 9. When extremely gifted students are permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, loneliness and social isolation disappear and these children become accepted as valued classmates and friends (Hollingworth, 1929).

The Gifted Preschooler

Research on gifted children reveals that even in early childhood they display significant differences from the developmental patterns observable in age-peers of average ability.

Early development of exceptional verbal ability is often considered to be a sign or characteristic of giftedness. At age 2, an extensive vocabulary and agile use of language in a young gifted child will be remarkably evident. Freeman (1985) found young gifted children to be verbally precocious in three skill areas: talking, reading, and writing. This high verbal ability was found to be present as early as 3 years of age.

Gifted preschoolers are able to convey their ideas more easily to their peers, to communicate their feelings and to give directions. Often you will find these children sought out by peers for companionship, ideas and decisions.

Kitano (1985) found that in addition to demonstrating high levels of accumulated knowledge and thinking abilities, preschool gifted children also showed evidence of pre-logical thinking, creativity, discomfort with ambiguity and spontaneous incorporation of academic activities into free play. Perhaps as a reflection of the gifted child's greater language fluency, gifted preschoolers also talk about problems, rules and goals to a greater extent than do their average ability peers.

Berninger and Abbott (1995) found that kindergarten-age children who showed signs of math precocity had more complex reasoning skills and memory skills such as verbal reasoning skills, ability to remember complex information and ability to decode other symbolic systems such as maps and written language.

Curiosity, concentration, memory and a sense of humor are seen as areas of differentiation between gifted and non-gifted preschoolers. They may respond to riddles and verbal associations because of their ability to think quickly and see relationships more than peers of the same age. One of the most outstanding characteristics of young gifted children is their high level of emotional sensitivity, which allows for the early development of values, empathy and responsibility. Gifted preschoolers show more than average sharing and helping behaviors, more reactions to others' signs of distress and more sensitivity to the needs of others.

Determining School Readiness

The Colorado State Board of Education approved definition of school readiness states:

> *School readiness describes both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten.*

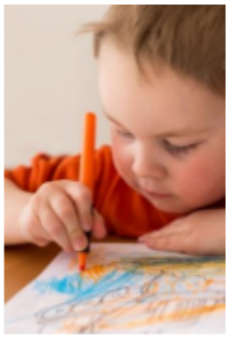
CAP4K (SB08-212) requires that all students in a publicly funded kindergarten be assessed using a state approved school readiness assessment. The purpose of school readiness assessment is to inform the development of an individual school readiness plan in order to provide a responsive learning environment for each child. Information gathered from school readiness assessments is to be used for supportive and instructional purposes and cannot be used to deny a student admission or progression to kindergarten or first grade.

The State Board of Education approved the following research-based assessments to measure school readiness:

- Teaching Strategies GOLD
- Teaching Strategies GOLD Survey
- Riverside Early Assessments of Learning (REAL)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP-K 2015)

These tools assist pre-school and kindergarten teachers to assess the following six required domains in School Readiness Legislation:

1. Social/emotional
2. Physical
3. Language
4. Cognitive
5. Literacy
6. Math



AUs are encourage to utilize these state approved assessments to support early access assessment. For more information about School Readiness, visit the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness. http://www.cde.state.co.us/early

Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access

Aptitude			
Name	***Age***	***Administration***	***Contact***
Cognitive Abilities Test 7 (CogAT 7)	K-12	Group	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test, Second Edition (NNAT2)	K-12	Group	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Batería III Woodcock Muñoz (Cognitive)	2:0 – 90+	Individual – In Spanish	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Battelle Developmental Inventory, Second Edition (BDI-2) +	Birth to 7:11	Individual	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Bilingual Verbal Abilities Test (BVAT)	5:0 – Adult	Individual	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Differential Ability Scales-II (DAS-II)	2:6-17:11	Individual	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children, Second Edition (KABC-II)	3:0-18	Individual	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, Second Edition (K-BIT2)	4:0 -90:0		Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Stanford Binet Intelligence Scales, 5th Edition (SB 5)	2 to 85 + years	Individual	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test (UNIT)	5:0 – 17:11	Individual	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540
Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Fourth Edition (WPPSI-IV)	2:6 – 7:3	Individual	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Woodcock Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities, Fourth Edition – Brief Intellectual Ability	2:0 – 90+	Individual	Riverside Publishing, riversidepublishing.com, 800.323.9540

Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access, continued

Achievement			
Name	***Age***	***Administration***	***Contact***
Test of Early Mathematics Ability, Third Edition (TEMA-3)	Ages 3-0 through 8-11	Individual	PRO-ED, Inc., proedinc.com 800-897-3202
Test of Early Reading Ability, Third Edition (TERA-3)	Ages 3-6 through 8-6	Individual	PRO-ED, Inc., proedinc.com 800-897-3202
Test of Early Written Language (TEWL-3)	Ages 4-0 through 11-11	Individual	PRO-ED, Inc., proedinc.com 800-897-3202
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Third Edition	4:0–50:11	Individual	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com, 800.627.7271
Woodcock-Johnson IV Normative Update (NU) Tests of Achievement, Forms A and B	2 to 90+	Individual	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt - Riverside, 800.323.9540; riversidepublishing.com

Performance			
Name	***Age***	***Administration***	***Contact***
Gifted Evaluation Scales (GES)	5:0-18:0	Teacher Rating Form	Hawthorne Educational Services, Inc., hawthorne-ed.com, 800.542.1673
Gifted Rating Scales - Preschool (GRS-P)	4:0 through 6:11 years	Teacher Rating Form	Pearson, pearsonassessments.com 800.627.7271
Scales for Identifying Gifted Students (SIGS)	Ages 5-18	Teacher Rating Form	Prufrock Press, http://www.prufrock.com/ 800.998.2208
Kingore Observation Inventory, 4th Edition (KOI)	K-8	Teacher Rating Form	Professional Associates Publishing, kingore.com
Work Sampling via classroom performance or student portfolio			

Commonly Used Assessments for Early Access, continued

School Readiness – Approved for Colorado			
Name	***Age***	***Administration***	***Contact***
The Desired Results Developmental Profile for Kindergarten (DRDP-K)	Grade K	Teacher observation	Center for Child & Family Studies at WestEd, 800.770.6339 drdpk.org
The Riverside Early Assessment of Learning	Birth to 7:11	Teacher observation and assessment	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt - Riverside, 800.323.9540; riversidepublishing.com
Teaching Strategies Gold	Birth - K	Individual	Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood, 800.637.3652 teachingstrategies.com
Teaching Strategies Gold Survey – Kindergarten Entry Assessment	Grade K	Teacher questionnaire	Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood, 800.637.3652 teachingstrategies.com

Acceleration Guidelines			
Name	***Age***	***Administration***	***Contact***
Iowa Acceleration Scales, Third Edition	K - 8	Team completion	Great Potential Press, 520-777-6167

Literature Supporting Early Access

Assouline, S., Colangelo, N., & VanTassel-Baska, J. (2015). *A Nation Empowered*. Iowa City, IA: Belin-Blank Center.

Hertzog, N. (2008). *Early Childhood Gifted Education*. (Gifted Child Education Practical Strategies Series). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Porter, L. (2005). *Gifted Young Children: A Guide for Teachers and Parents.* Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Smutney, J., Walker, S. & Honeck, E. (2016). *Teaching Gifted Children in Today's Preschool and Primary Classrooms: Identifying, Nurturing and Challenging Children Ages 4 – 9.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirt Publishing.

Smutney, J., & von Fremd, S. E. (2010). *Differentiating for the Young Child: Teaching Strategies Across the Content Areas PreK-3, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

APPENDIX G: E-MAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Gifted and Talented Coordinators and Directors,

My name is Ruthi Manning-Freeman and I am a graduate student attending the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about early entrance to school (kindergarten or first grade) for underage gifted learners. You are eligible to participate in this study because you are named on the database maintained by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Exceptional Student Services Office as the contact person responsible for your school district's gifted programming and the fact that your school district/administrative unit (AU) has a current early access addendum on file with CDE.

If you choose to participate in this study through a simple online survey, you will be contributing to statewide data collection about House Bill 08-1021 – Early Access enacted in 2008. The goal of the study is to determine the factors that lead school districts to engage in the process of identification and admission of underage gifted learners and to examine the successes school districts have experienced in welcoming these gifted young learners. There is no funding for this project; it is solely for the purpose of research and dissertation data collection.

Participation is completely voluntary. There are no personal identifying questions that will be asked of you. You may choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to be part of the study, or have any questions about the study, please e-mail or contact me at Ruthi.Manning-Freeman@du.edu or call 719-237-4555. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, norma.hafenstein@du.edu, via e-mail or by phone at 303-871-2527 should you need any clarification.

Thank you in advance,

Ruthi Manning-Freeman

APPENDIX H: REMINDER E-MAIL

Hello Gifted Colleagues,

I wish to thank all of you who already completed the survey about early access. I am excited to let you know that 30% of the target audience responded to my request. That is exceptional.

I would love to reach a 50% response rate. For those of you who have not yet responded, please take a few minutes to do so. It will further validate the work I am personally trying to accomplish and work that can ultimately support future gifted programming in Colorado.

APPENDIX I: CONSENT FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY of DENVER
Morgridge College of Education

DU IRB Exemption Granted: September 19, 2016
Valid for Use Through: September 18, 2021

Title of Research Study: Positive Factors Influencing Early Access in Colorado

Researcher: Ruthi Manning-Freeman, Graduate Student, Morgridge College of Education

Description: You are being asked to participate in a research study because you are the identified director or coordinator for gifted programs in your school district or administrative unit. By doing this research we hope to learn about the positive factors that influenced your school district or administrative unit when you engaged in the process to admit underage gifted learners to kindergarten and first grade.

Procedures: If you agree to be a part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey. The survey is eighteen (18) questions, and will take less than fifteen minutes.

Voluntary Participation: Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any survey questions, or you may end the survey at any time for any reason without penalty.

Questions: If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Ruthi Manning-Freeman at 719-237-4555 and or email ruthi.manning-freeman@du.edu at any time. You may also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein at 303-871-2527 or via email norma.hafenstein@du.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

The DU Human Research Protections Program has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

Before you begin, please note that the data you provide may be collected and used by Qualtrics, an online system as per its privacy agreement. This research is only for U.S. residents over the age of 18 (or 19 in Nebraska). Please be mindful to respond in a private setting and through a secured Internet connection for your privacy. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent.
Please keep this form for your records.